

BUILD PARTNERSHIPS AND NETWORKS

A variety of formal and informal networks, collaboratives, and partnerships exist in the field, spanning and bridging different sectors. These networks have the potential to help move forward complicated and ambitious agendas and contribute to sustainability. While such networks are critical for coordination and larger impact, there is a lingering sense that existing networks are fragile.

Several black male-focused networks have dissolved over the past years, demonstrating how tenuous these groups can be. The Black Male Donor Collaborative, for example, was a promising partnership of corporate donors and foundations committed to improving the academic achievement of black males in New York City. The Collaborative ultimately folded when the economic recession, as well as changes in leadership, caused corporate partners to pull back. Grantmakers for Children, Youth, and Families' Healthy Men, Healthy Communities initiative is another example of a network that faded away due to a lack of clear goals and leadership.

Key elements of strong networks include financial support specifically for the network, clearly identified purpose and mission, staffing support, and trusted leadership and facilitation. As Marc Philpart, who helps build and nurture networks as part of his work at PolicyLink, states, "Facilitation is incredibly important; networks don't just form on their own. You have to have someone actively curating and cultivating that group and trying to focus on building community."

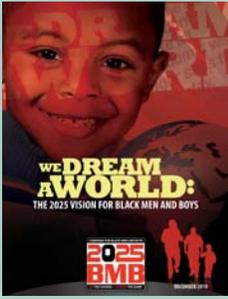
COORDINATING AND SYNCHRONIZING THE WORK

As the number of organizations working in the field of black male achievement in some shape or form grows, it is increasingly important to coordinate what Root Cause's Andrew Wolk describes as a growing and crowded field. Though networks are not yet operating optimally, they have the potential to minimize duplication of effort and maximize field-level impact.

COSEBOC is a national network of school leaders serving boys and young men of color. Its membership represents 600 schools educating 300,000 students, and the network plays a critical role in information sharing and learning. For example, COSEBOC sends out research on promising practices to its members, provides standards-based professional development, and offers networking opportunities, such as its annual Gathering of Leaders.

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Ron Walker, executive director, COSEBOC



2025 NETWORK FOR BLACK MEN AND BOYS

A boy born in 2007 will be 18 years old by the year 2025. How do we ensure that his life and opportunities are significantly different from what black males currently experience? This was the question posed by the 2025 Network for Black Men and Boys, a national collaboration of several organizations and individuals formed in 2006. The answer was framed in a comprehensive policy platform, *We Dream a World*, written by Rhonda Tsoi-a-Fatt Bryant of CLASP. The report served as a roadmap for the nascent work of black male achievement and guided several foundations as they began considering portfolios focused on black males.

Though heralded as an extremely important, pioneering effort, the Network has been plagued by challenges. Initially, it was housed at the Twenty-First Century Foundation, but the Foundation's merger with the Tides Foundation in 2012 deprived the already under-resourced network of key supports. Other foundations have supported specific projects, but investment in the infrastructure of the Network itself has been minimal. The Network's work continues as participating organizations ante up volunteer time and staff resources. Most recently, the Network hosted a series of webinars on gun violence.

Despite its struggles, Marcus Littles of Frontline Solutions describes the individuals from the 2025 Network as the backbone of local efforts currently taking place in cities across the country. "The current national infrastructure of black male achievement rests on the shoulders of 2025," he states. Still, the experiences of 2025 as a network hold lessons for the field today. Littles observes that robust networks require investment in infrastructure and strategy as well as organic leadership that is, to some degree, independent of funders.

In an effort to promote better coordination, the Institute for Black Male Achievement provides infrastructure and support for five communities of practice. They are the Responsible Fatherhood Roundtable, the Promise Neighborhoods Institute, the California Alliance for Boys and Men of Color, and the National League of Cities, which encompasses two technical assistance initiatives: Cities for Black Male Achievement and Cities United.

These communities of practice are a space for participants with a commitment to black male achievement to share knowledge and align their respective activities toward common goals. The IBMA coordinates this dialogue in a formal manner, more so than what might occur in ad hoc meetings or through chance encounters at conferences. By scheduling regular meetings, offering a clearer mission and sense of purpose, and staffing work groups, these communities of practice are able to strategize collaboratively and share their learnings with one another to make their work more effective.

LEVERAGING RESOURCES ACROSS SECTORS

In addition to coordinating efforts, networks and partnerships can break down silos and contribute to sustaining the work by helping to leverage resources across sectors. States Ron Walker, executive director of COSEBOC, "We need to find synergies across the playing field. If we don't connect the dots, then it will be one more example of an opportunity missed, reinventing the wheel, or wasting time."

Decker Ngongang, who oversees the Echoing Green Black Male Achievement Fellowship, sees informal partnerships beginning to form among Echoing Green Fellows and members of the field of black male achievement. He believes these connections will ultimately contribute to the sustainability of the work by "diffusing access to resources in wider and deeper ways that allow for the most impactful and efficient tools to get to everyone without implied gatekeepers." By making these links, Ngongang believes the field can better manage risk: "If foundation X stopped giving to organization Y tomorrow, the

intellectual and social capital isn't cut off. The movement doesn't die with one organization."

BRIDGING LOCAL AND NATIONAL WORK

Much of the attention, particularly from national foundations, has focused on major urban centers or national organizations. One area of opportunity for networks is to help bridge local and national work. Greg Hodge, a longtime consultant and youth development policy advocate, observes, "There are so many interesting possibilities when you elevate something to a national conversation, but then there's got to be some resources that begin to

flow at the local level to really implement some of those ideas."

Just as the national infrastructure can catalyze local capacity, the regional work can also inform the national conversation. Chris Chatmon, who leads Oakland Unified School District's Office of African American Male Achievement, notes, "There are experts and tacticians of African-American male achievement in every neighborhood, in every school. Sometimes we don't do a good enough job looking at the brilliance of the folks who are actually doing the work in every city."

RESOURCES



Brotherhood of Elders Network

Intergenerational Bay Area network instills cultural pride and identity and serves as community thought partners and advocates.



Catalyzing Networks for Social Change

Monitor Institute, Grantmakers for Effective Organizations

Guide assists grantmakers in using networks to build and boost the impact of their philanthropy.



A Gathering of Leaders 2013: Postscript

Report highlights recommendations and lessons learned from a three-day convening of social change leaders working to improve opportunities for males of color.



Institute for Black Male Achievement, Communities of Practice

Collaborative infrastructure supports networks of leaders to connect, share knowledge, and align their activities toward shared goals.



Leadership and Action Network, Association for Black Foundation Executives

Group of program officers and foundation leaders meets quarterly to discuss best practices and ways to sustain the work.



Scholars Network on Black Masculinity

Association of academics committed to reshaping understandings of the lives of African-American men.

For additional resources, visit: bmafunders.org/beloved-community



Photo: Urban Prep Academies