

# CORPORATE, FAITH, AND OTHER SECTORS

“ This is an all-hands-on-deck issue. Everyone has to be diligent, and anyone with an interest in the broader, long-term stability of our nation must see this as an essential issue. ”

John Grant, CEO, 100 Black Men of Atlanta

Among our interviewees, there was universal agreement that the field needs engagement from all segments of society. “When we say ‘the field of black male achievement,’ we’re still talking somewhat narrowly about two major sets of players: nonprofits and philanthropy,” according to Greg Hodge, a youth development policy advocate and consultant working with several organizations in the field. “There is a lot of space for other folks to get involved.” Bridging this space requires messaging and strategies to engage sectors that may not immediately see a role for themselves in this work.

## CORPORATE SECTOR

Perhaps the sector identified as most critical to engage is the corporate sector. In 2006, a group of lawyers from Sullivan & Cromwell and a handful of other New York City legal firms launched an initiative called Pipeline Crisis|Promoting Winning Strategies. The goals were to convene and engage the legal and financial services community, given their concerns about recruiting and retaining diverse workforces, especially African-American males. After several well-attended and high-profile events, the group decided to focus on five areas: early childhood and preschool, public school education, criminal justice, employment and economic development, and high-potential youth. Although the group made some progress

and continues to work, the financial collapse of 2008 curtailed its momentum.

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Roger Blissett, managing director at RBC Capital Markets and a member of the Pipeline Crisis|Promoting Winning Strategies leadership team, believes that despite the group’s struggles, it remains critical to engage the corporate community. He recommends a pragmatic narrative, since the corporate community tends to focus on the bottom line. That narrative includes the nation’s changing demographics and the importance of ensuring that men of color have opportunities for education and employment that allow them to contribute economically to society. “It’s jeopardizing our

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competitive standing in the world economy. These are going to be the workers of tomorrow. To keep ourselves competitive, we need to access the creativity of everyone in the United States.” Since the corporate sector also has to consider the satisfaction of consumers, of which African Americans make up a growing segment, Blissett notes that consumers also play a role in demanding action from companies whose products they consume.

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Businesses can be engaged by extending jobs and scholarships to young people. Leaders within companies play a role in ensuring diversity and inclusion. John Rogers, CEO and chairman of Ariel Investments, helped begin the annual Black Corporate Directors Conference, providing camaraderie and support to African Americans sitting on corporate boards to address civil rights issues. “If we’re not pushing,” he states, “nothing will change.”<sup>7</sup>

## FAITH COMMUNITY

Many interviewees also view the faith community as an untapped resource that can be more deeply engaged in the field. Marc Philpart of PolicyLink laments, “Faith leaders have a critical role to play; there are so many of them who want to do this work, and I think we just fell down on being as inclusive as we could be.” In the summer of 2013, Frontline Solutions, with funding from the Open Society

Foundations, brought together Christian and Muslim faith leaders to discuss opportunities for engagement. To date, however, there are few partnerships between philanthropic and faith organizations. Frontline Solutions’ Micah Gilmer acknowledges that partnering with faith institutions tends to require intensive, relational work, but it is an effort that has the potential to yield substantial benefits.

The PICO National Network’s Lifelines to Healing campaign is one example of engagement by the faith community. The campaign brings together more than 300 congregations across the country to stop community violence and end mass incarceration, two issues that disproportionately affect boys and men of color. In partnership with local congregations, the campaign has successfully advocated for changes in policy and practice in communities across the country. Another example is the Samuel DeWitt Proctor Conference, which engages progressive African-American faith leaders and their congregations in social justice issues.

## OTHER COMMUNITIES

In addition to the corporate sector and the faith community, interviewees identified a range of other constituencies that could be more deeply involved in the field. Celebrities, for instance, have the potential to attract enormous attention to the issues facing black men and boys. The actor Jesse Williams has done this both as an executive producer of the video art project Question Bridge, which explores black male identity in America, and also as a supporter of the California Endowment’s Sons and Brothers campaign. The California Community Foundation involved actor Larenz Tate in its BLOOM initiative, and former basketball player Magic Johnson has pledged his support to the White House initiative My Brother’s Keeper.

Interviewees also mentioned opportunities for greater engagement from national organizations, particularly civil rights organizations, including

## SUPPORTING BLACK MEN & BOYS: ALL HANDS ON DECK

To improve life outcomes for black men and boys, it will take the collective commitment of the philanthropic, nonprofit, government, and corporate sectors, working alongside established mainstream organizations and upstart grassroots organizations. And there is a role for everyone as individuals to contribute—women, young people, global communities, and black men themselves.





Photo: Echoing Green

the NAACP, the Urban League, and the Children’s Defense Fund. Although all of these organizations are active in some way, there remain opportunities to tap the reputation and histories of these organizations more deeply. Likewise, historically black colleges and universities were seen by some as a resource not fully utilized by the field.

Many argued for more partnerships and intersections with “mainstream” organizations and professional associations working in the arenas of education, criminal justice, and employment, given their natural connections to work with black men and boys and their broader reach. Several interviewees also highlighted the importance of strong female voices in the movement and of being clear that a focus on black males does not exclude women.

Loren Harris, former program officer for Ford Foundation, and Darren Walker, Ford Foundation’s current president, both noted that their international experiences convince them that there are important connections to be made between support for black males domestically and the work happening internationally within the diaspora.

To that end, Amaha Kassa, Echoing Green’s Black Male Achievement fellow, began an organization, African Communities Together, to empower Africans both in America and on the African continent to increase the diaspora’s social, economic, and political power.

