INCREASE THE EVIDENCE BASE

Across the board, funders and practitioners alike acknowledge the need for a better understanding of what is working—and not working—in the field. Such knowledge is crucial for developing approaches that can achieve desired outcomes, develop standards, leverage additional funding, and be taken to scale for greater impact. Bob Ross, president of the California Endowment, summarizes, "There are far more well-intentioned, opinion-laden anecdotes of effectiveness than there are evidence-laden proven practices."

A handful of organizations represented by our interviewees—Black Family Development, Inc., Harlem Children's Zone, Los Angeles Brotherhood Crusade, and United Way of New York City among them—describe data collection and data-based decision making as a core part of their work. The United Way of New York City, for example, has a research arm responsible for evaluating the organization's work and recommending course corrections.

Most interviewees, though, recognize their organizations could be doing a better job of documenting and evaluating their work. Shawn Dove of Open Society Foundations acknowledges, "The Robert Wood Johnson Foundation waded into this with evaluation at the front end. That's something we didn't do and so we're backtracking to figure out how best to do that."

BE EXPLICIT ABOUT GOALS

To advance evidence-based practice, it is critical to be clear about the desired goals and outcomes. For example, all too often programmatic goals and desired outcomes do not match up with available resources. Making choices about what to prioritize, whether it is a subject area, geographic area, or population group, or some combination of these, is key. This targeted approach helps set the work up for success rather than failure. Likewise, for programs with a broader focus on boys and men of color, it is important to be explicit within that frame about what works for whom and how cultural nuances might influence the intervention or its impacts.

> **" There are far more well-intentioned, opinion-laden anecdotes of effectiveness than there are evidence-laden proven practices. "**
>
> Bob Ross, president, California Endowment

DISAGGREGATE DATA

Measuring goals and outcomes requires good data, and for the work of black male achievement, disaggregated data are essential. Geoffrey Canada of Harlem Children's Zone explains that while boys in their programs are doing better than their peers nationally, the girls they work with tend to do better. The agency is bolstering its efforts among the lower grades with the goal of keeping boys engaged over the long term through sports and other programs.

As multilevel and ecosystemic approaches take shape, a challenge can be measuring community- and systems-level outcomes versus individual-level goals. Here, too,

disaggregated data are critical, as experience by education advocates demonstrates. Data by the Department of Education's Office for Civil Rights highlight the disparities faced by black male public school students in suspensions and expulsions. Advocates have used this knowledge to drive systemic reforms in school disciplinary policies. Data by race and gender are needed for all issues affecting black men and boys, including the foster care system and probation, in order to begin conversations that can change systems.

FOCUS ON EVALUATING INTERVENTIONS

Many interviewees cited the need for more research, particularly around interventions. Micah Gilmer of Frontline Solutions specializes in applied research and observes, "We're not at a place where we're able to say from a causal standpoint, these activities are the best ways to do it." There are many promising practices that need more evaluation to be identified as evidence-based best practices.

BELL (Building Educated Leaders for Life) is nationally recognized for its rigorous program evaluation and serves as a model for other o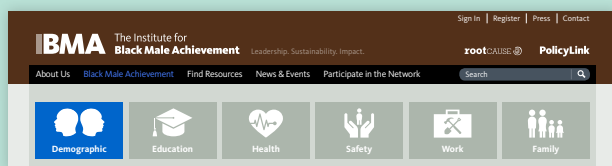rganizations. All its evaluation activities are guided by an external, interdisciplinary advisory board, and BELL issues annual evaluation reports for its programs. The Urban Institute completed a two-year randomized study of BELL's summer program and found statistically significant evidence of its impact on children's reading achievement and parental involvement. BELL was chosen to be a part of the Social Impact Exchange's S&I 100 Index, the first broad index of U.S. nonprofits with proof of their results.

Interviewees cited specific areas where more evaluation is needed, including rites of passage programs, as well as mentoring programs, particularly as they relate to youth outcomes. Joe Jones, who works on fatherhood issues, cites the need to better understand how participation in a fatherhood program directly impacts child development. Understanding the impact of these programs and the factors that contribute to their success is important for practitioners and funders alike, as the field seeks to scale up the work for greater impact.

CREATE A SHARED FRAMEWORK

Beyond program-level goals and outcomes, many interviewees advocated for a shared field-

TOOLS FOR ASSESSING PROGRESS AND MEASURING IMPACT

As practitioners aim to understand what works, what doesn't, and how to take best practices to scale, there are a growing number of tools at their disposal. For example, the Foundation Center's Tools and Resources for Assessing Social Impact (TRASI) gives practitioners easy access to more than 150 measures, interview protocols, and other tools, cutting across issue areas, to assess program progress and measure impact. But a major issue is ensuring that protocols are culturally relevant. To that end, BMAfunders.org has created an outcomes toolkit that focuses on measures that have been used reliably and effectively with black males in previous research.

In Spring 2014, IBMA launched another key resource, the Black Male Achievement Life Outcomes Dashboard, a central location for practitioners to obtain indicators that track opportunity for black males. The Dashboard will help IBMA members assess how black males are faring nationally and locally, choose measures that best correspond with their goals, and adopt promising policies and practices. The Dashboard includes 16 demographic, education, health, safety, economic, and family indicators and will focus initially on 17 cities, including New York City, Los Angeles, and Detroit.

wide framework. Building a common framework with a targeted set of outcomes can advance the field by helping to shape language, strategy, and marketing and communication efforts. To this end, the IBMA has built the Black Male Achievement Life Outcomes Dashboard to track a focused set of measures in order to assess progress in improving the life outcomes of black men and boys (see sidebar on p. 47).

The California Endowment has also taken initial steps toward creating a developmental framework for its work, based on research, which it believes could be a starting point for field-wide conversations. Ray Colmenar of the California Endowment suggests that "if the field can map themselves onto this framework, it could be a helpful tool to organize ourselves and

the field to do the work. This sort of mapping can help you get to the next level of strategy." Used thoughtfully, a shared framework can minimize duplication of effort and maximize impact by encouraging foundations and their nonprofit partners to think about their work in a coordinated, strategic, field-level manner.

ABFE is also advancing this effort, working with Mark McDaniel, a scholar based at the University of North Carolina, to identify measures of progress and indicators of success. Susan Taylor Batten, president and CEO of ABFE, hopes McDaniel's efforts can help articulate and document "what we collectively mean by progress and success" across foundation initiatives supporting black men and boys.

RESOURCES

Accelerating Results for Black Males: Resource Guides for Promise Neighborhoods
Guides help communities promote black male achievement, with a particular focus on data and results.

BMA Life Outcomes Dashboard
Institute for Black Male Achievement
Dashboard tracks life outcome measures to provide the field a unifying reference for assessing progress at local and national levels.

Outcomes Toolkit
BMAfunders.org
Online collection of tools includes datasets, survey instruments, and interview protocols that have been used with black males to measure outcomes and benchmark progress.

TRASI: Tools and Resources for Assessing Social Impact
Foundation Center
Online database contains over 150 ready-to-use tools to measure the impact of social programs and investments.

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