

PHILANTHROPY

“ Endowed philanthropy is the freest capital in the whole U.S. It’s the only money where what you do with it has no bearing on how much of it you’ll have in the future. So if anybody can try a different approach, it should be us. ”

Trabian Shorters, founder and CEO of BMe and former vice president at the John S. and James L. Knight Foundation

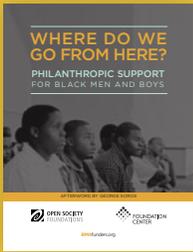
Philanthropic support explicitly designated for black men and boys is more than two decades old, going back to the W.K. Kellogg Foundation’s African American Men and Boys Initiative, launched in 1992. Two years later, Ford Foundation, Annie E. Casey Foundation, and Charles Stewart Mott Foundation followed suit with fatherhood initiatives focused on African-American families. However, these family- and fatherhood-focused projects eventually faded away. Since then, there have been ebbs and flows in foundation engagement, with major funders entering (and leaving) the field and others shifting course.

In the past six to seven years, however, there has been renewed philanthropic interest, with a growing cohort of foundations making substantial commitments in support of black males. Among the most prominent and well-funded of these is Open Society Foundations’ Campaign for Black Male Achievement, which was launched in 2008 to address the economic, political, social, and educational exclusion of black men and boys from the American mainstream. The Campaign has sought to build black male achievement both as a brand and as a field, committing over \$50 million to more than 100 organizations.

Importantly, from its inception, the Campaign framed its work around solution-focused approaches and asset-based language—a deliberate counter-narrative to past efforts that focused on “disadvantaged” or “marginalized” males and the “plight” of black males. In its strategic plan, the Campaign emphasizes structural solutions focused on advancing public policy reforms and catalyzing key institutional and cultural changes that can help black males thrive. In that vein, Shawn Dove, manager of the Campaign, states, “The mere naming of the Campaign for Black Male Achievement and calling it that was a success out of the box.”

The Campaign’s investments have been critical to shaping the field. In the years following George Soros’ investment, other foundations have followed suit. John S. and James L. Knight Foundation, Kapor Center for Social Impact, and California Community Foundation formed initiatives specifically addressing the experience of black males, while others, including the California Endowment and Robert Wood Johnson Foundation, established portfolios focused on boys and men of color.

Foundation commitments have grown steadily in recent years. In 2011, foundations awarded more than \$40 million in grants, up from \$29 million in the previous year. Between



The Foundation Center's 2012 report *Where Do We Go From Here? Philanthropic Support for Black Men and Boys* documents the wide range of activities supported by foundations and provides baseline funding data.

BMAfund.org

BMAfund.org, launched in March 2013, lifts up the role of philanthropy in supporting black men and boys. With an array of resources, the site strives to facilitate engagement, collaboration, and strategic decision making among funders and other stakeholders.

2008 and 2011, 191 foundations made nearly 900 grants to over 400 organizations. Importantly, while large, national foundations contribute the bulk of grant dollars, there are numerous local and regional foundations, such as the Winthrop Rockefeller Foundation in Arkansas, Skillman Foundation in Detroit, and Kapor Center for Social Impact in the San Francisco Bay Area, that are playing critical roles in advancing the conversation about black male achievement in their local communities.

These foundations tackle a wide range of issues. The Open Society Foundations' Campaign for Black Male Achievement's portfolio focuses on education and family, as well as strategic communications and building the capacity of the field. The Heinz Endowments has done critical work on community engagement and communications, using its base in Pittsburgh as a testing ground for initiatives that can be scaled more broadly. As health foundations, Robert Wood Johnson Foundation and the California Endowment bring the language of prevention, early intervention, and well-being to their work.

Loren Harris, who led the Ford Foundation's work on black males in the mid-to-late 2000s, has seen philanthropic efforts for black males shift over the years. He remarks, "Philanthropy is better coordinated than it was five years ago, for sure. The donor community hasn't reached an optimal operating state of coordination, but the foundation leadership has recognized that this is an area for collective action, for collective impact. This sends a very strong

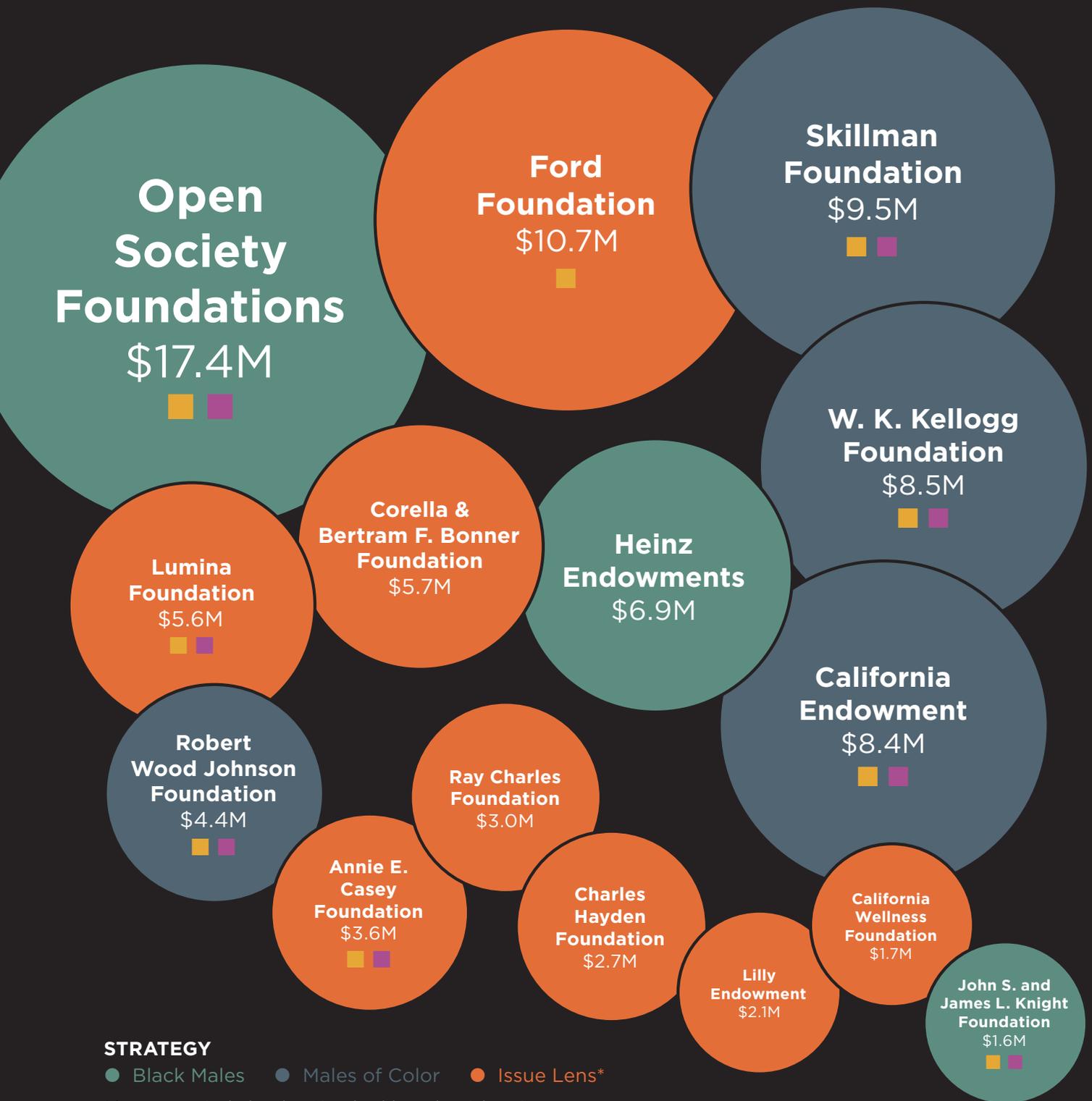
signal that things are being done differently, that foundations see that there's a greater opportunity to collaborate."

Collaboration is occurring through several donor networks that include a focus on black males, the most significant being the Executives' Alliance to Expand Opportunities for Boys and Men of Color. Formed in April 2013, the Alliance brings together a growing cohort of foundation presidents who have committed to increasing investments, as well as raising public will and policy attention, to boys and men of color (see sidebar on p. 18). In addition, ABFE's Learning and Action Network (LAN) centers on black male achievement and allows funders to learn about and learn from each other's work.

The Executives' Alliance and the LAN work in close collaboration to leverage resources and coordinate efforts. Leaders from 11 foundations are also engaged in an intensive collaborative planning process to build the philanthropic scaffolding and engagement of the federal initiative, My Brother's Keeper. Ray Colmenar, senior program manager of the California Endowment, believes these efforts are critical to strengthening the field: "We don't have enough resources to be inefficient in the way we engage and support this work. To the extent that we can see natural alliances and alignment, we should exploit those."

In addition to formal networks with regular meetings, there have been several foundation-initiated convenings to bring key stakeholders together. Open Society Foundations gathered

TOP 15 FOUNDATIONS FOR BLACK MEN & BOYS, 2008-2011: FUNDING, STRATEGIES, & NETWORKS



STRATEGY

- Black Males
- Males of Color
- Issue Lens*

* Issue areas include education, health, and racial equity.

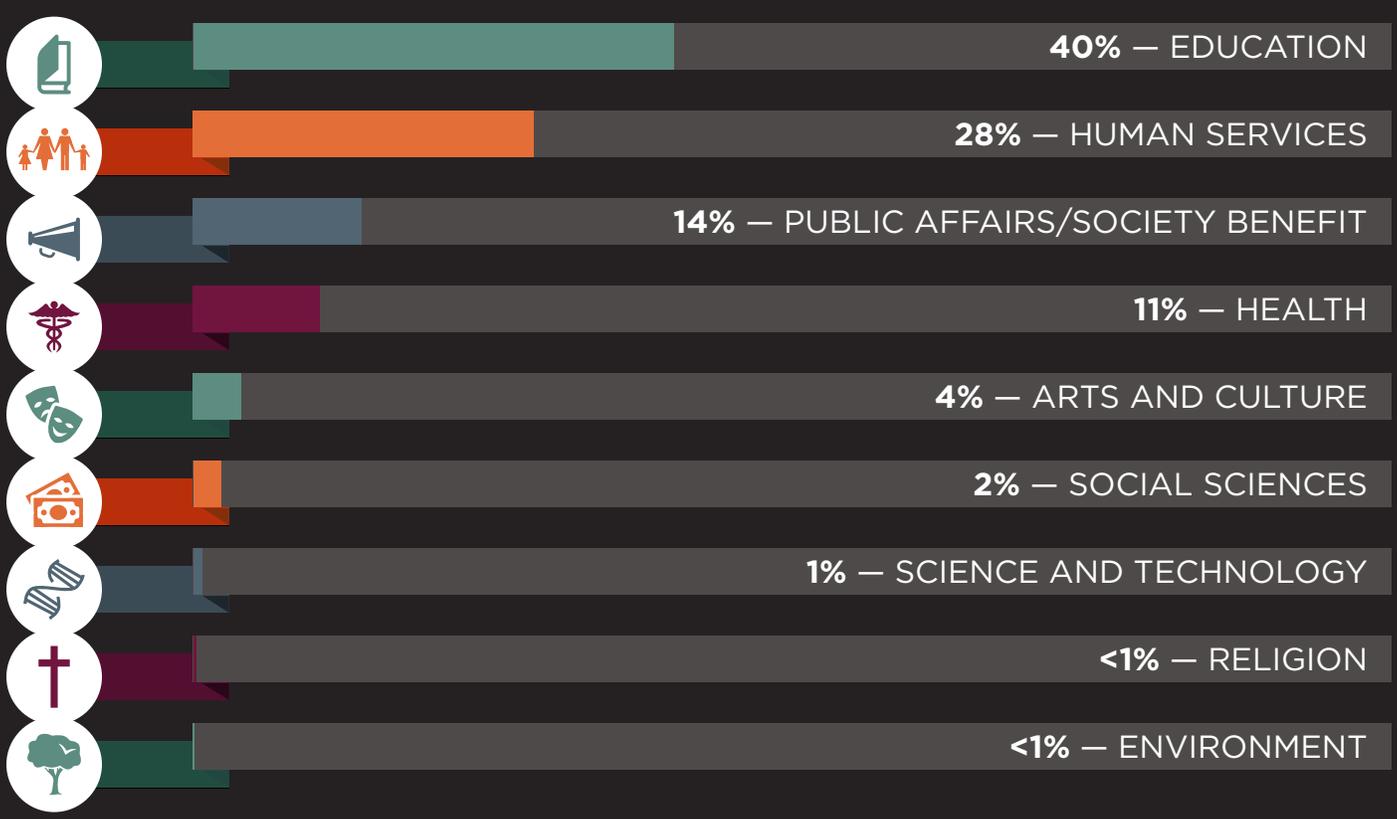
NETWORKS

- Executives' Alliance
- ABFE's Leadership and Action Network

FOUNDATION SUPPORT FOR BLACK MEN & BOYS, 2008-2011



GRANTS FOR BLACK MEN & BOYS BY ISSUE AREA, 2008-2011



For detailed grants information on black men and boys, visit bmafunders.org/funding-map.

Foundation Center, 2014. Based on grants of \$10,000 or more awarded by a national sample of independent and family, corporate, community, and operating U.S. foundations. To avoid double counting of grant dollars, we exclude public charities. Figures represent only grants awarded to recipient organizations that could be identified as serving black males or grants whose descriptions specified black males. Thus, these figures do not reflect all giving benefiting black males. For more on Foundation Center data, see p. 16 of *Where Do We Go From Here? Philanthropic Support for Black Men and Boys*.



“If you want to go fast, go alone. If you want to go far, go together.”—African proverb

On April 7, 2013, 26 foundation presidents gathered in Chicago in conjunction with the Council on Foundations annual meeting to discuss their institutional commitments to improving the life outcomes of boys and men of color. Following this historic and unprecedented meeting, the group released a joint statement of intent indicating a collective commitment by the foundations to “evaluate promising approaches, advocate for effective public policy and systems change, and invest in these young men as assets for America’s future.” A year later, the Alliance has grown to nearly 40 foundations and is refining its goals, outcomes, and structure to serve as a “big tent” for the long-term engagement of the philanthropic sector on these issues.

The work of the Executives’ Alliance is still taking shape, but interviewees were largely encouraged by the formation of the Alliance and excited by its potential. According to Darren Walker, president of the Ford Foundation, the Alliance “brings focus and synergy to this issue.” Key opportunities for the Alliance to advance this work include leveraging the voice of foundation presidents, committing to increased financial investments, and coordinating field-wide strategies. 

LEVERAGING THE VOICE OF PRESIDENTS

Part of what made the April gathering historic was the collection of foundation presidents at the table. Tia Martinez, a consultant who helped bring the group together, states simply, “Presidential leadership matters. Having boards and presidents be both externally and internally supportive of the work changes this game.” At the same time, Trabian Shorters notes that foundation politics can be complicated, and that it is important to have institutions and boards that are willing to take the lead of their presidents. “The heads of each of these agencies [must] have enough political capital within their own institutions to steer it in a way that it would not otherwise go.”

To that end, multiple interviewees mentioned the importance of the “cover” the Alliance provides for presidents and leaders to engage in this work, giving presidents crucial support from their peers to advance the agenda at their own institutions.

MAKING REAL INVESTMENTS

Gathering foundation presidents together to make a public commitment was a victory for the field. But Open Society Foundations’ Shawn Dove states pointedly, “I’m not satisfied with [just] the pledge. It’s going to be critically important how we transfer the pledge into investments.” Similarly, Walker says he is heartened by the initial engagement, but that the success of the Alliance rests on “a commitment by the presidents to deeply engage on this issue and sustain their level of enthusiasm—and match that enthusiasm with resources, both financial and human.”

A number of Alliance members have already pledged \$750,000 each over the next three years to support the infrastructure and operations of the My Brother’s Keeper initiative. Some noted that foundations should use the power of their brands to encourage investment outside of the philanthropic community.

SETTING CONCRETE TARGETS AND COORDINATING STRATEGIES

Many assert that the Alliance must be concrete not only in its investments, but also in its goals. While acknowledging the difficulty of foundations with different missions and priorities to reach consensus, Bob Ross, president of the California Endowment and one of the conveners of the Alliance, suggests picking “three to five high-level national goals representing success on a comprehensive front.” To this end, Shorters suggests choosing an area of collaboration on a concrete and achievable goal. Shorters believes, “To have a win that’s a product of collaboration would get a whole lot more collaboration.”

While setting concrete targets and coordinating strategies is a major area of opportunity for the Alliance, Ray Colmenar explains that choosing the term “alliance” was deliberate and that a broad, shared vision is just as important. “It’s not a coalition. We’re not trying to get everyone to do one thing. An alliance supports members in multiple objectives, consistent with a shared vision.”



leaders across multiple sectors at its Innovation and Impact Forum for Black Male Achievement in October 2012 and co-hosted two media summits, Black Male Re-Imagined I and II, with the Knight Foundation, Ford Foundation, and American Values Institute, focused on transforming perceptions of black men and boys. Robert Wood Johnson Foundation, with support from Frontline Solutions, engages more than a dozen funders to host the annual Gathering of Leaders meeting, which is frequently cited as an important event, attracting social change leaders across the country whose work focuses on advancing the success of males of color. These convenings have provided a venue

for developing relationships and connecting disparate efforts as part of a national field.

One major task ahead for philanthropy is bringing the issue to a broader audience, “getting the message out in front of the non-choir,” as Rahsaan Harris, executive director of Emerging Practitioners in Philanthropy (EPIP), puts it. There is evidence of progress on this front, with a pre-conference on black male achievement at the 2014 Social Impact Exchange Symposium and featured programming on boys and men of color at the 2014 Council on Foundations annual conference.