



2023 REPORT

THE MAYOR'S OFFICE OF
BLACK MALE ADVANCEMENT

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR ACTION

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Prepared for
Black Men and Boys Commission
City of Boston

Table of Content

■	Executive Summary.....	3-4
■	2 Introduction.....	5-6
■	Overview of the Office of BMA.....	7-8
■	Significance of Ongoing & Future Work.....	9-12
■	Framework for Next Action Steps.....	13-17
■	Proposed Next Action Steps.....	18-30
■	Conclusion: Moving Forward.....	31-34
■	Appendix.....	35-36

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY¹

On June 16, 2021, Mayor Michelle Wu issued An Ordinance Creating a Commission on Black Men and Boys. As noted on the city’s website, “The OBMA works to empower Black men and boys. We want to ensure they have equitable access to opportunities in the city. As part of our work, we focus on policies, programs, resources, and local and national partnerships.”² The Commission was established based on a 2021 Ordinance sponsored by At-Large City Councilor Julia Mejia and signed by former Mayor Kim Janey. Former City Councilor and current Chair of the Commission Tito Jackson was the original sponsor of this legislation. On February 2, 2022, Mayor Wu appointed Mr. Frank Farrow as Executive Director of Mayor’s Office of Black Male Advancement (OBMA).³

Based on earlier reports and best practices identified in the field, this review proposes twenty action steps that could serve as initiatives to improve the quality of life for Black men and boys. This review is framed by the Mayor’s Executive Order cited above.⁴ The methodology for this Report included a review of select national and local literature focusing on the status of Black men and boys. Public documents pertaining to the status of Black males in Boston were reviewed. Meetings with staff and the Commission also informed the Report, as did a review of social, demographic, economic, and education data.

Five components or guideposts form a framework for considering action steps leading to effective strategies to improve the lives of Black men and boys. They must be based on

- culturally empowering and assets-based approaches;
- directly or indirectly linked to economic empowerment;
- designed to take advantage of collaborative partnerships;
- reflect a realistic balance between such and the need for resources to build organizational capacities related to the implementation and assessment of impacts;
- collection of data and information and its analysis must reflect significant and sustained participation of Black men and boys served by initiatives.

These five components are discussed in greater detail in the Report.

¹ This Report was prepared by James Jennings, PhD., Professor Emeritus of Urban and Environmental Policy & Planning at Tufts University. He was assisted by Anh Nguyen, a highly respected community and civic activist in Boston with extensive entrepreneurial and small business experiences. She is the former Executive Director of Bowdoin-Geneva Main Streets. The author also wishes to acknowledge Dr. Carline Pignato, a long-time Boston educator for sharing insights about the topic.

² <https://www.boston.gov/departments/black-male-advancement#black-men-and-boys-commission>.

³ Former Mayor Martin Walsh established My Brother’s Keeper Boston in collaboration with the national My Brother’s Keeper founded by President Barack Obama in 2014.

⁴ Two sections of the Executive Order are particularly germane to this Report: Section “D. Designing projects and programs that promote equity for Black men and boys which are not currently being implemented by existing city agencies;” and Section “J. Producing reports pertaining to the work of the Commission and the progress of the city and the community to advance the status of Black men and boys.”

Based on the guideposts above, **six areas for attention and actions** are identified, including:



- 01 Training and Opportunities to Increase Entrepreneurship, Financial Acumen, and Homeownership

- 02 Workforce and Local Economic Development

- 03 Stronger Connections with Public Health and Public Safety

- 04 Greater Involvement with Civic Engagement and Community Organizing

- 05 Targeted Connections with Boston Public Schools

- 06 Identifying and Eliminating CORI Obstacles to Economic Mobility.

Twenty next action steps are organized by the above categories. And for each category, potential sectors for initiating partnerships and related activities are listed. A broad strategy for moving forward would include OBMA reviewing and vetting the proposed next action steps in terms of short or long-term priorities; necessary refinement; resources needed; key actors to be involved; how to measure if adopted; and time for implementation. Its findings would be presented to the Commission for further discussion and decisions. The OBMA and the Commission would then sponsor meetings to collaborate with key actors involved with specific next action steps.

The twenty next action steps should be planned collaboratively. OBMA should not be unrealistically expected to play a sole role in adopting and implementing the proposed action steps. But it can play a critical and facilitative role, what some refer to as a “backbone organization” or “anchor organization” in corralling resources and helping the city and agencies to implement some of the proposed next action steps. It is proposed that a 2-year period for prioritizing and implementing and assessing adopted action steps would be appropriate.

INTRODUCTION

Nationally there are numerous important strategies and initiatives aimed at improving the life chances of Black men and boys.⁵ While some of the reports describing these initiatives help to inform this discussion, this Report's proposed next action steps are specific to Boston. The proposed action steps are based on a conceptual framework for addressing historical and contemporary inequities faced by Black men and boys, but also as ways to either directly or indirectly assist in closing the racial wealth gap in this City. The framework entails five key guideposts:

The framework entails five key guideposts:

- Action steps must fundamentally be based on culturally empowering and assets-based approaches.
- Action steps should be directly or indirectly linked to economic empowerment.
- Action steps should be designed to take advantage of collaborative partnerships.
- Action steps should reflect a realistic balance between such and the need for resources to build organizational capacities related to the implementation and assessment of impacts.
- Action steps should include collection of data and information and its analysis must reflect significant and sustained participation of Black men and boys served by initiatives.

⁵ The Office of Black Male Advancement have compiled a spreadsheet summary of strategies and reports; see, MBK Action Plans .xlsx.

Within this framework the proposed next action steps are organized by activity categories suggested in select national literature and local documents provided by OBMA. A timeframe of two years is suggested for prioritizing, implementing, and then assessing impacts of the proposed action steps. Both the framework and ensuing categories correspond, in part, to the Milestones described earlier in the MBK Boston Recommendations for Action (2015). The Commission’s Committee recommendations were also a basis for designing a framework and proposing next action steps.⁶

The six categories used to organize proposed next action steps are:



Training and Opportunities to Increase Entrepreneurship, Financial Acumen, & Homeownership



Workforce and Local Economic Development



Stronger Connections with Public Health & Public Safety



Greater Involvement with Civic Engagement & Community Organizing



Targeted Connections with Boston Public Schools



Identifying & Eliminating CORI Obstacles to Economic Mobility.

⁶ The Office of Black Male Advancement have compiled a spreadsheet summary of strategies and reports; see, MBK Action Plans.xlsx.

Overview of the Mayor's Office for Black Male Advancement

OBMA's mission is to improve outcomes and reduce systemic barriers to advancement for Black men and boys living in Boston. The Office works to empower Black men and boys by ensuring they have equitable access to opportunities in the city. Their goal is to ensure Black men and boys have access to, and continuing support to thrive and share in the City's prosperity.⁷ OBMA sponsors and supports several initiatives to meet its mission, including:

Black Male Advancement Community Empowerment Small Grant:

The Community Empowerment Small Grant exists to empower Black male serving community-based organizations with proven or promising programs that share our core values and are highly aligned with our strategies, goals, and approaches to deepen their impact or bring their work to scale.

My Brother's Keeper Boston:

An initiative that continues collaborative work with the national MBK to close opportunity gaps.

Young Black Leaders Boston:

This program is aimed at young Black males in Boston's public high schools interested in becoming more civically engaged.

Black Men Lead Boston:

Black Men Lead Boston is for Black men in Boston who wish to take more civic ownership and become leaders in the community. The program is a multi-week course for Black male residents of Boston, prioritizes introducing participants to key City of Boston officials and learning how to effectively navigate local government.

Project Opportunity:

An initiative to generate and organize resources for residents with Criminal Offender Records Information (CORIs).

⁷The OBMA leadership and staff includes Frank Farrow, Executive Director; Donte Peoples, Community Engagement Manager; Elijah Richards, Resource Development Manager; Jeysaun Gant, Program Manager for My Brothers Keeper; Maddrey Goode, Chief of Staff; Branden A. Miles, Policy and Research Manager; Skip Gonsalves, Black Men's Initiative Program Manager; Naman McDaniels, Administration & Finance Manager; Sirak Kurban, Strategic Communications & Digital Manager

Non-profit Capacity Building Institute:

The capacity institute provides technical assistance to community-based organizations that share our core values and are highly aligned with our strategies, goals, and approaches to deepen their impact or bring their work to scale. The institute provides nonprofit capacity-building solutions, through a combination of 1:1 coaching, peer-to-peer learning, fundraising, governance, board management, storytelling, and compliance support.

R.E.A.C.H 1000 Mentoring:

A collaboration between OBMA, My Brother's Keeper Boston, and Boston Public Schools aimed at strengthening mentoring and youth development.

These programs were designed after review of numerous reports about other Black male initiatives throughout the country, as well as meetings with civic and community leaders in Boston, including the Commission.⁸

OBMA collects and shares information that sheds light on various facets of the lives of Black men and boys. The Office's focus is on ages 8 to 55 years. The Office has published a comprehensive social, demographic, and economic overview of Black men and boys in Boston based on census and administrative data.⁹ The Office also supports the efforts of the Black Men and Boys Commission.

The Commission is made up of twenty-one members who advise the mayor about issues and challenges pertaining to Black men and boys.¹⁰ Its aim is to implement initiatives to improve outcomes for Black life in Boston. The Commission is composed of sub-committees based on the following priorities:

- Community Safety & Returning Citizens
- Economic Opportunity & Workers Empowerment
- Public Health & Wellness and Fatherhood & Families
- Education & Youth Advancement
- Affordable Housing & Pathways to Homeownership
- Racial Justice & Equity

⁸ Also see, Tiana Woodward, "A year later City Office for Black Men and Boys laying foundation for their future" The Boston Globe (February 26, 2023).

⁹ See, The State of Black Males in Boston, Published by The OBMA in partnership with the Boston Planning and Development Agency (BPDA) Research Division (September 2022).

¹⁰ See, Draft,

<https://docs.google.com/document/d/1plQylaH9RNOcipICWh5162yhdXM7ctISTTZzifcojsk/edit?usp=sharing>

SIGNIFICANCE OF ONGOING & FUTURE WORK



Across the nation strategies for improving the lives and opportunities for Black men and boys include calls for boot camps; rites of Passage; mentoring; workforce training; arts; recruitment and retaining more Black male teachers; connecting with families; providing outreach and information about health inequities; providing supportive services, including in the areas of health, housing, and jobs to individuals involved with criminal justice systems; and, strengthening community-based restorative justice approaches.

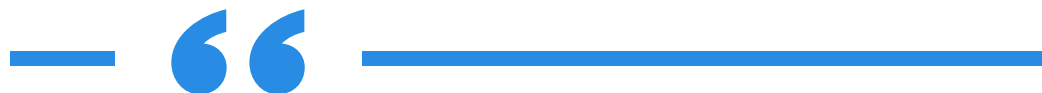
An important reason for assessing the social and economic status of Black men and boys is that in Boston and across the nation more than any other group, Black males face “significant challenges that may have adverse effects on their loved ones, future aspirations, and productivity in society”¹². They are the only group where homicide is a top-five cause of death.¹³ Locally, and as is documented in OBMA’s report, *The State of Black Males in Boston*, there are glaring inequalities between Black males—and also Latino males—and Whites in Boston. Racial disparities are reported in the areas of education, employment and earnings, housing, assets and liabilities, and health. And Black males have more negative experiences with the criminal justice systems and hold more CORIs than other groups in Boston.

¹¹ Black Men and Boys Commission Recommendations for Mayor Wu - Google Docs

¹² Moffitt, Kimberly, *State of Black Males and Public Education*. University of Maryland, Baltimore County, via email correspondence with James Jennings (May 10, 2012).

¹³ Gilbert, K., Ray, R., Siddiqi, A., “Visible and Invisible Trends in Black Men’s Health: Pitfalls and Promises for Addressing Racial, Ethnic, and Gender Inequities in Health,” *Annual Review of Public Health*, 37 (2016).

A National League of Cities report, *City Leadership to Promote Black Male Advancement*, states that:



The challenges experienced by families that live below or just above the poverty line negatively impact black male advancement in numerous ways. Lack of stable and safe housing, high rates of mobility across neighborhoods and school districts, home environments that are not conducive to learning, parental stress and family instability, inadequate health care and nutrition, and a dearth of high-quality childcare options, early learning programs and out-of-school time activities can all contribute to worse educational outcomes for black male students. Moreover, black families are substantially more likely than white families to be “asset poor,” with little or no savings to weather a financial emergency, avoid unmanageable debt, or invest in education and homeownership. This wealth gap has widened significantly since the recent financial crisis and recession. Recognizing the link between poverty, student achievement and local economic vitality, cities are increasingly employing strategies to boost family incomes and increase their financial stability.¹⁴



The COVID-19 Pandemic only worsened this scenario for Black males. In a paper published by Brookings Institute, *The Challenges Facing Black Men – and the Case for Action*, a team of researchers documented continuing gaps between Black men and White men in the areas of Education and Public Schools; Upward Mobility and Poverty; Labor Force Participation Rates and Unemployment; Life Expectancy; Criminal Justice Inequalities; and in COVID-19 deaths.¹⁵

¹⁴ National League of Cities, Institute for Youth, Education & Families, *City Leadership to Promote Black Male Advancement*, Municipal Action Guide, Washington D.C. (2012), p.18; also see, Kasey Wiedrich, Stephen Crawford, and Leigh Tivol, *Assets & Opportunity Special Report: The Financial Security of Households with Children*, CFED (2010) at: http://cfed.org/knowledge_center/research/financial_security_of_households_with_children/.

¹⁵ Richard V. Reeves, Sarah Nzau, Ember Smith, *The challenges facing Black men – and the case for action*, Brookings, (November 2020) at: <https://www.brookings.edu/articles/the-challenges-facing-black-men-and-the-case-for-action/>.

Despite these enormous challenges, it is erroneous to present a deficit view of Black male life in urban areas. Yet for some in academia and public life, the deficit narrative is a dominant one: “Educational research in the United States often ignores the resilience and strengths of Black boys and men. For decades, researchers and public discourse have focused on viewing Black boys from a deficit perspective, highlighting the myriad of ways they have been negatively impacted by systemic factors within the educational system.”¹⁶ Public policies and practices associated with public education, criminal justice systems, public health and safety, housing, workforce development have been implemented over decades based on deficit views of Black males must be challenged and changed.¹⁷

The reality is that there is a range of potential and actual assets and resources that have been and are still being tapped, not just as resistance to continuing racial inequality and inequities, but also to strengthen the vitality of the Black community. Many community leaders understand that Black men and boys are crucial for effective strategies. There are numerous nonprofits which connect Black men and boys to social, educational, and economic opportunities. There are many Black businesses which employ Black men and women. There is a rich history of Black men and women in Boston leading various struggles in the fields of education, economic empowerment, health, the arts, and others to improve living conditions for everyone.¹⁸

Black youth represent a critical part of Boston’s future. Based on the 2017–2021 Five Year Public Microdata Sample estimates, there are approximately 15,279 Black males between the ages of 24 and 55 residing in the “Boston City – Mattapan and Roxbury” PUMA designation, 03304.¹⁹ The average personal income for all these Black males is \$47,129. The average age is 37 years. Approximately 34% of these Black males are homeowners with a mortgage, including home equity loans. Another 6% own their homes ‘free and clear’. And approximately 862 of these Black males are self-employed. Another 851 are state or federal government employees. About 1100 are employed by the city; almost 1,984 are employees of private not-for-profit, tax exempt, or charitable organizations; and 10,265 are employees of private for-profit-company or business and earn wages, salaries, or commissions.²⁰

¹⁶ Keisha M. Wint, Ijeoma Opara, Rahjaun Gordon, Derrick R. Brooms, “Countering Educational Disparities Among Black Boys and Black Adolescent Boys from Pre-K to High School: A Life Course–Intersectional Perspective” September 20, 2021, p.183 at: <https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/34565917/>.

¹⁷ For earlier works see, E.C. Banfield’s *The Unheavenly City* (1973) or later, Lawrence Mead, *The New Politics of Poverty* (1992), but there is a genre of contemporary literature presenting socially negative portrayals of Black men and boys.

¹⁸ For a review of some of these struggles see, Melvin B. Miller, *Boston’s Banner Years: 1965–2015, A Saga of Black Success* (Archway Publishing, 2018).

¹⁹ PUMAs, or Public Use Microdata Samples, are arbitrary census boundaries of approximately 100,000 to 125,000 persons. Since PUMA data can be incredibly detailed the boundaries are drawn to ensure confidentiality. There are five PUMAs in Boston.

Civic-strong and economically vibrant Black communities require that the government and other sectors help to resolve the institutional and structural challenges facing this group, as well as women and girls in these communities. Strategies must be tailored to effectively respond to the social, economic, and educational needs of these groups. Strategies to reduce Boston's racial wealth gap requires a framework to challenge racial hierarchy and build Black community empowerment by making investments in areas of economic development, housing justice, wealth accumulation, education, environmental and climate justice, health, criminal justice, and political action beginning with investments in Black men and boys.

It is Black people who can better understand the needs within their own communities. Black people can reap the benefits of the rich experiences and generations of contributions where they are; they can continue to capitalize on the strong social networks and support systems; they can build upon existing resources and amenities, such as community centers, churches, and businesses; and staying in their communities is a form of resistance to this history of displacement, and is a way to maintain a sense of community and connection in the face of ongoing challenges and pressures.

²⁰ Additional detailed citywide and neighborhood data about Black men and boys in Boston can be found The State of Black Males in Boston, the report cited earlier published jointly by the OBMA and the Boston Planning and Development Agency – Research Division; also see earlier research reports, James Jennings, Social, Demographic, and Economic Profile of Young Black and Latino Males Boston, Massachusetts 2010 – 2018, Prepared for The Barr Foundation (April 2014); at: <https://sites.tufts.edu/jamesjennings/files/2018/06/reportsSocialDemographic2014.pdf>; and, Andrew Wolk and James Jennings, Mapping Momentum for Boston's Youth: Programs & Opportunities for Black and Latino Young Men (2016); at: <https://rootcause.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/05/Mapping-Momentum-for-Bostons-Youth.pdf>.

FRAMEWORK FOR NEXT STEPS ACTION

FIVE GUIDEPOSTS

A Boston framework for assessing next action steps should include the following five guideposts described in greater detail here:

01

Action steps must fundamentally be based on a culturally empowering and assets-based approach. OBMA sponsorships and organization of events such as the Father's Day Brunch and Community Empowerment celebration are especially important. Advancement should be continued, and these kinds of celebrations should be expanded. Evidence shows that "Programs that strengthen emotional connections between fathers and their children often go hand-in-hand with efforts to increase fathers' capacity as parents. In addition to offering parenting classes, city-led fatherhood initiatives work to improve fathers' ability and commitment to provide their children with sufficient financial support."²¹

02

Action steps should be directly or indirectly linked to economic empowerment. It cannot be overlooked that extensive economic inequalities are a result of historical factors but also contemporary policies and practices on the part of government, the private and third sector. Improving the economic lives of Black men and boys -at the same time challenging policies and practices that have sustained racial wealth gaps, are key components of any proposed strategies.

²¹National League of Cities, p.16.

Action steps must be designed to take advantage of collaborative partnerships. Building stronger linkages with community institutions and collaborative partnerships around specific goals and actions requires sustained financial support and participatory decision-making.

This is important because improving the lives and opportunities of Black men and boys goes together with strengthening their communities. As noted in a previously cited report above, community power is critical for successful strategies and initiatives: “Promoting community power and capacity means increasing efforts to help communities ‘identify priorities and opportunities to foster and sustain positive neighborhood change...When community capacity is high, communities can identify needs and assets, and direct resources to support thriving accordingly.’”²²

A commentary posted by Ashleigh Maciolek based on a forum sponsored by the Brookings Institution, *Breaking the Cycle: Overcoming the Challenges Faced by Black Boys and Men* noted that “High-poverty neighborhoods are typically characterized by poorer quality schools, less access to jobs, social networks, and health care, and higher rates of crime, pollution, congestion, and noise.”²³ Moreover, evidence suggests that boys tend to be more sensitive to their environment growing up, which often materializes in behavioral issues, lower educational attainment, lower earnings and more. Therefore, to address some of these adverse outcomes for Black boys and men, there should be greater investment in neighborhoods. Effectively designed and implemented place-based policies can improve the chances for Black men and their families, and ultimately restore communities.”²⁴

Action steps should reflect a realistic balance between such and the need for resources to build organizational capacities related to the implementation and assessment of impacts. Proposed actions must respect the balance between the call for new strategies and activities with organizational capacities. For example, the call for data collection and analysis is key, but should not be a burden to community-based organizations working with Black men and boys. The latter requires commitment and resources from other sectors interested in a Great Boston for everyone.

22 Love, G., Halmo, M., Reed, M. Power Beyond Measure: Reshaping the Research and Evaluation Landscape for Boys and Men of Color, Equivolve Consulting (Washington D.C. 2021), p.14.

23 <https://www.brookings.edu/events/breaking-the-cycle-overcoming-challenges-faced-by-black-boys-and-men/>

24 6 policies to address social problems affecting Black boys and men (December 15, 2020), at: <https://www.brookings.edu/articles/six-policies-to-address-social-problems-affecting-black-boys-and-men/>

Action steps should include collection of data and information, and its analysis must reflect significant and sustained participation of Black men and boys served by the initiatives. The data and its conclusions and implementation of strategies must be open, transparent and involve the Black male community in its design and analysis.

One report highlights this point:

“BMOC (Boys and Men Color) must be central to work that includes them. Centering BMOC means designing and funding research and evaluation that fully engages them, their skills, and their knowledge, and that explores their experiences as distinct and independent from white-defined expectations and ideals. The phrase “Nothing about us without us”²⁵ is explained further: “Too often, results of studies are kept only among the researchers and evaluators who conducted the study or the funders who supported the study. If BMOC are to be true partners in the work, results of those studies to which they contributed should be treated with shared ownership...BMOC cannot have control over their own narratives if they do not have access to the written or verbal products in which they are described and presented. Researchers, evaluators, and funders can facilitate dissemination and translation processes that are in partnership with and in service to BMOC and their communities.”²⁶

There is also a need to collect and organize data about the status of Black men and boys in ways which facilitate multi-year analysis. In terms of data, any action steps that are prioritized should be guided by 3 key queries: 1) how to measure progress, and over what period in the implementation of an action step; 2) how to measure short and long- range impacts; and 3) how will the results of this data be looped back into refining action steps. The input of Black males and boys is critical in strengthening and ensuring the quality of these queries.

25 Love, G., Halmo, M., Reed, M., p. 8.

26 Ibid., p. 36

These guideposts are like those proposed in the National League of Cities report cited above. The latter calls for using “...Evidence of Unequal Outcomes to Define the Challenge (p.6); working with “...Local Partners to Tell the “Story Behind the Numbers” (p.9); identifying “...Key Stakeholders who are Working to Improve Outcomes” (p.11); and establishing a “...Shared Vision, Measurable Goals, and a Clear Plan for Making and Tracking Progress”²⁷

Another initiative, the Task Force on Achieving Academic Equity and Excellence for Black Boys in Maryland, developed evidence-based recommendations and strategies in three key areas: social, emotional, and behavioral support; recruiting and training skilled, competent teachers and administrators; and academic support and interventions. But there was also an insistence that efforts be intentional, deliberate, and sustained.

And efforts also need to be measured for tracking performance and achieving desired impacts. A broad inter-agency framework is also necessary to ensure that adequate resources are being utilized effectively to improve the lives of Black men and boys. These conditions for success are consistent with Mayor Wu’s Executive Order.²⁸

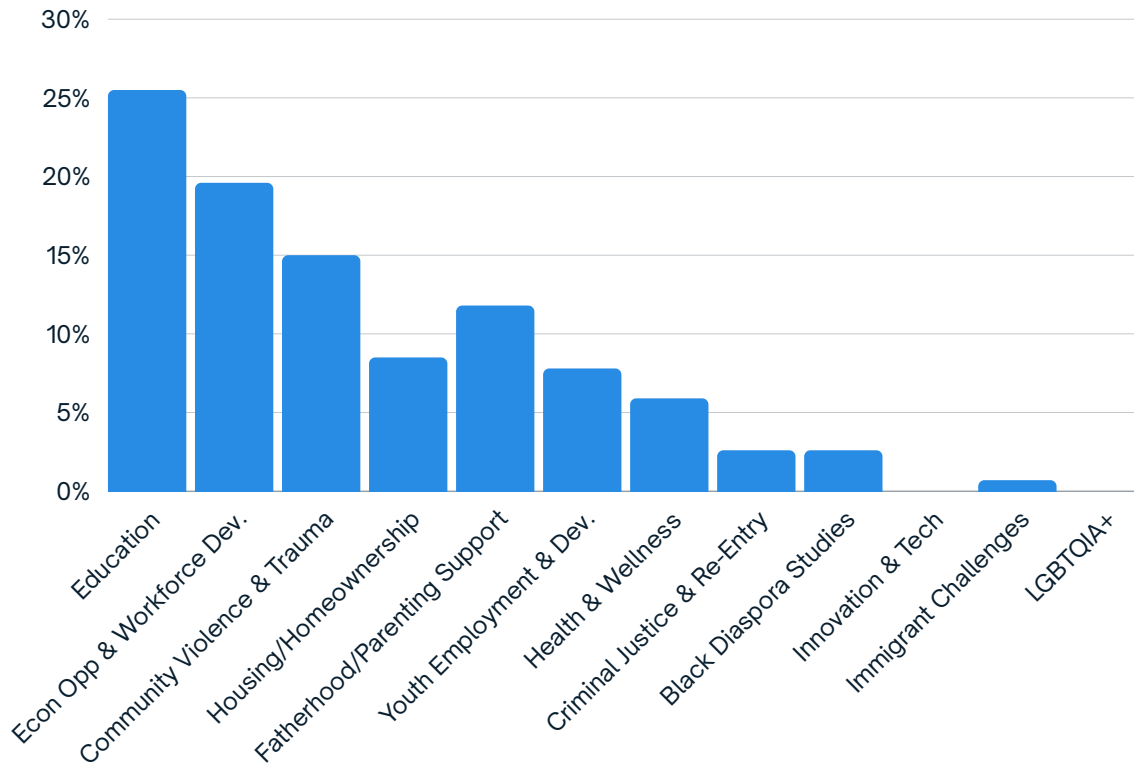
Utilizing Mayor Wu’s Executive Order as directive and context, the next action steps are proposed in terms of “designing projects and programs that promote equity for Black men and boys which are not currently being implemented.” Brief descriptions are provided about potential outreach strategies and communication related to the action steps. Various types of agencies and organizations are mentioned as potential sites upon which to build partnerships with OBMA and the Commission for greater impact and reach. The next steps proposed are structured in ways that could facilitate funding from philanthropic organizations with interests to partner with the proposed actions.

The action steps below reflect the views of many individuals involved with improving the lives of Black men and boys in Boston. An online survey was conducted during the Spring of 2023 to assess what might be the top priorities of persons involved with issues related to improving opportunities and meeting challenges faced by Black men. A total of 153 individuals, aged 18 – 64 years of age responded to this survey. Most of the respondents resided or worked in Dorchester (53); Roxbury (20); Mattapan (16); and Hyde Park (14). Responses were also based in other neighborhoods and some cities outside of Boston.

²⁷ National League of Cities, p.12.2

²⁸ Task Force on Achieving Academic Equity and Excellence for Black Boys, TRANSFORMING THE CULTURE OF MARYLAND’S SCHOOLS FOR BLACK BOYS, Maryland State Board of Education (June 2021).

The following chart shows that the areas of education (25.5%) and economic opportunity & workforce development (19.6%) represented the top priorities which should receive attention. This was followed by 15.0% of the respondents who selected attention to community violence and trauma as requiring the greatest attention.



The survey responses reported here mirror priorities by the earlier My Brother’s Keeper Boston Advisory Committee appointed by former Mayor Martin J. Walsh. This Advisory Committee selected as Milestone 1 emphasis on “graduating from high school ready for college and career.” As Milestone 2, the Advisory Committee decided on “Successfully Entering the Workforce” with an emphasis on youth employment and workforce and business development. And Milestone 3 focused on “Reducing Youth Violence and Providing a Second Chance.”²⁹

25.5%

Education

19.6%

Economic opportunity & workforce development

Education (25.5%) and economic opportunity & workforce development (19.6%) represented the top priorities which should receive attention.

²⁹ Also see, Saraya Wintersmith and Esteban Bustillos, “Mental health, wealth gap rises among top issues impacting Black men at inaugural community listening session” GBH (July 7, 2022).

PROPOSED NEXT ACTION STEPS

It should be emphasized that the status and social, economic, and educational well-being of Black men and boys is a city-wide issue. Furthermore, the challenges facing Black men and boys are a result of a history, policies and practices that led to diminution of social, educational, and economic opportunities for this group. Therefore, OBMA or the Commission should not be unrealistically expected to play a sole role in adopting and implementing the proposed action steps. But it can play a critical and facilitative role, what some refer to as a “backbone organization” or “anchor organization” in corralling resources and helping the city and agencies to implement some of the proposed next action steps. As noted above there should be a 2-year period for prioritizing and implementing and assessing adopted action steps.

In considering new action steps described below OBMA and the Commission should meet with city representatives to discuss ongoing plans related to the social, education, and economic well-being of Black men and boys, but also specific action steps that may require city actions. Meetings should include representatives of the Boston Public Health Commission; Mayor’s Office of Returning Citizens; the Boston Public Schools; the Boston Police Department; and other agencies.

Bounded by the conceptual framework above, the following are proposed next action steps within the six categories, or buckets. Also suggested below are potential sector partners or broad program areas that might be helpful with planning and implementation of action steps.

- 01 Training and Opportunities to Increase Entrepreneurship, Financial Acumen, and Homeownership

- 02 Workforce and Local Economic Development

- 03 Stronger Connections with Public Health and Public Safety

- 04 Greater Involvement with Civic Engagement and Community Organizing

- 05 Targeted Connections with Boston Public Schools

- 06 Identifying and Eliminating CORI Obstacles to Economic Mobility.

Training and Opportunities for Developing Entrepreneurship Skills, Financial Acumen, and Homeownership

Potential partner sectors: banking; financial advocacy and empowerment; homeownership promotion and financing; high skills job training; Main Streets; other.

1 MBK Boston should meet with officials from financial institutions, nonprofit organizations, higher education institutions and the philanthropic sector to inquire whether it is possible for these groups to plan collaboratively a prototype community-based workshop aimed at teaching youth financial literacy and other topics related to financial acumen. It is important for Black youth to understand basic principles of saving money, but it is also important for the Black community to understand the wealth that it creates, and to grow wealth collectively. A related activity could be an arrangement with Boston's Worker Empowerment Cabinet to offer its Budgeting Basics to groups of Black men and boys in community settings.

2 Identify community organizations or public initiatives that teach entrepreneurial skills. Entrepreneurship provides pathways to wealth building through business ownership and at the same time serves as a gateway to community wealth. Empowering more Black men to become business owners is critical since Black male-headed family households are more likely to have three or more workers than other family households.³⁰ Furthermore, entrepreneurship can help connect youth to their communities, showing them how to tap their creativity by starting or looking forward to owning their

³⁰ Miller, S., Putnam, A., Piazza, M., & Broady, K., *Shifting Perspectives and Expectations on Employment*, (2023), at: www.fedcommunities.org/workervoices

own businesses. Building a healthy, thriving business is an asset that can directly improve the financial security of more than the entrepreneur, and be a platform for community wealth building. Also, encouraging youth to think about starting a business and considering what this entails in such a process can be empowering.

The BPS Office of Family and Community Advancement, or its 10 Boys Initiatives could also hold workshops about entrepreneurship. Part of this can include exposing young people to the history of Black innovation.

Individual public schools might be tapped as partners with business schools to teach and support students' exploration of entrepreneurship. This can be planned and implemented through curricula, internships, and introduction of students to local business leaders. Additionally, schools and business partnerships could sponsor contests for innovative ideas and projects through which groups of high school students could win prizes or recognition. While it may not be resource feasible for the OBMA to plan and implement such a range of activities, it can act as an advocate and serve as monitor for these kinds of supports.



3 Community based organizations should put OBMA on their mailing lists for information about resources that can be helpful for its work and that of the Commission. OBMA can connect its clients to housing workshops run by these organizations which could also provide context about displacement and gentrification in some parts of Boston, and tenant rights as well. These workshops can also cover community land trusts. Organizations may not be directly involved with housing as such, but if they interact with Black men and boys this is certainly one way to get more information into their hands.

4 OBMA and the Commission should ask housing agencies to consider targeting two homeownership workshops in places where Black men and boys reside in relatively high numbers. Black CBOs located in these areas should provide the space for such workshops, and the OBMA could assist with outreach and invitations for potential participants.



Workforce and Local Economic Development: Partnering with MBE's And WMBE's

Potential partner sectors: job training programs; career advancement; economic development; higher education; Main Streets; other.

5 There should be greater emphasis on connecting local MBEs and WMBEs with Black men and boys. This can take the form of mentorships, summer and year-round jobs for students and adults. Some of the city's Main Streets might already have relationships with local legal, or health, or real estate, or construction businesses. Correspondence and communication from Main Streets can be shared to their business organization networks to inquire about the possibilities of mentorships or paid internships for Black men and boys.

6 Increase Black male interns to work in high tech companies with meaningful and educational jobs. Black interns at current tech companies are not a panacea for the dearth of Black-owned tech businesses, but it is one crucial step as part of a long-range response.³¹ OBMA could send similar correspondence about internship possibilities to Black individuals who work in the tech sectors.

7 OBMA should ask (community based / nonprofit organizations to plan two community workshops about how to build wealth and understand the financial instruments used for such. Even something like how credit scores are determined can facilitate paths towards a



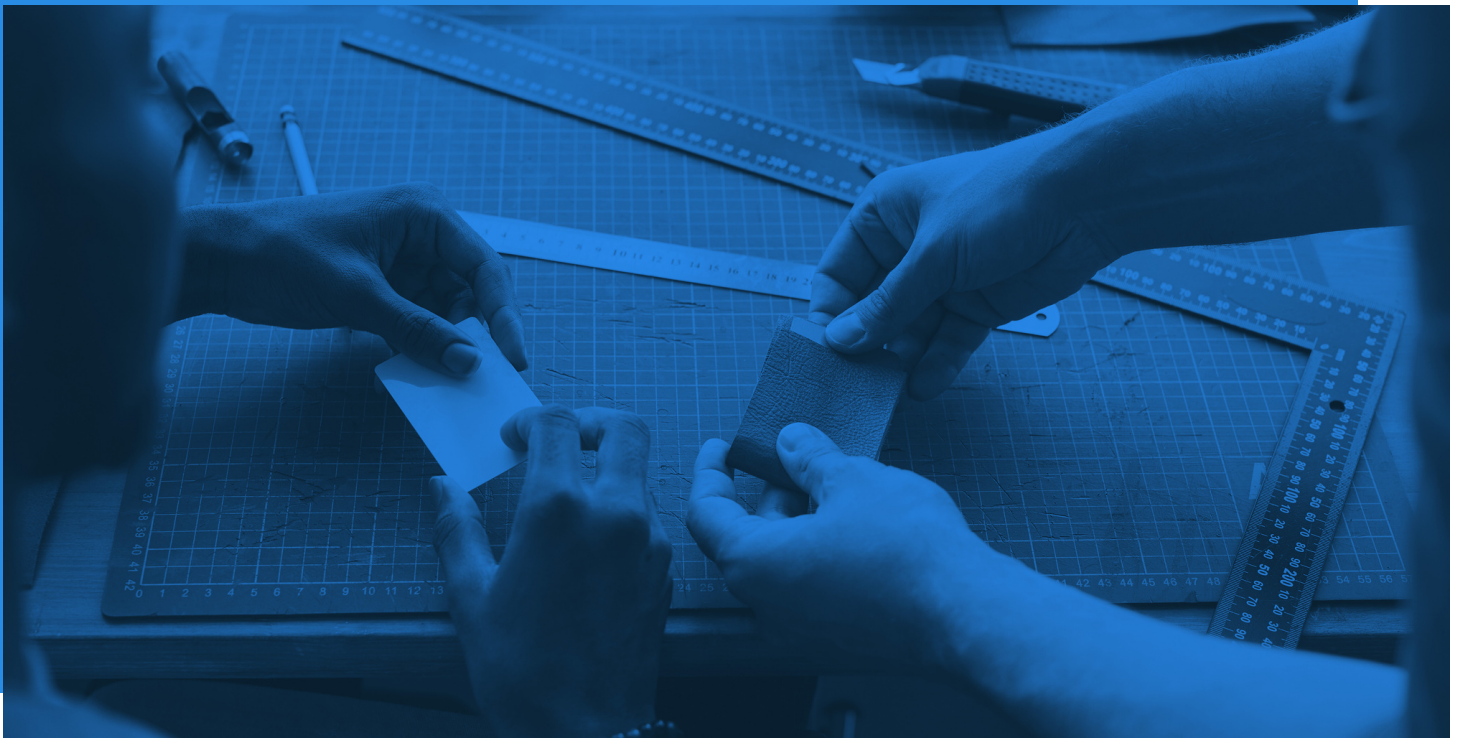
³¹ See, Ed Gaston, Executive Director of the Greater Grove Hall Main Streets: "We need a plan to Boost the Number of Black Tech Entrepreneurs in Boston" DigBoston, (March 4, 2022); also earlier, "We Must Increase the Number of Black-Founded Tech Companies in Mass. Here's How" DigBoston, (November 22, 2021).

degree of economic self-empowerment. OBMA would do extensive outreach for Black men and boys to participate in these workshops.

Apprenticeships: There is a tremendous opportunity for Black youth to be enrolled in training programs and apprenticeships for high quality green economy jobs. OBMA should request a directory of apprenticeship opportunities that it can share with organizations working with Black men and boys. OBMA can position itself to be a conduit of information and connections it and city programs such as the Greater Boston Equitable Apprenticeship Pathways.

8 A meeting with Boston's Chief of Economic Opportunity and Inclusion and the Chief of Worker Empowerment could help to facilitate this kind of work. Also, existing policies or requirements associated with apprenticeships or job training opportunities such as bonus bidding points, monitoring, and implementation should be summarized into one-pagers for sharing. This kind of information may already be available in various city agencies.

9 OBMA should meet with community college leaders and staff to introduce its mission and work and consider how it can assist in recruitment of Black men to obtain AA degrees associated with the emerging green economy.





10

The HUD Section 3 Regulation can be a major tool for ensuring that certain kinds of federal contracts are utilized to train and hire Black men and boys. As described on HUD's website: "The Section 3 program requires that recipients of certain HUD financial assistance, to the greatest extent possible, provide training, employment, contracting and other economic opportunities to low- and very low-income persons, especially recipients of government assistance for housing, and to businesses that provide economic opportunities to low- and very low-income persons."³² This is a tool that can work as both an employment and business resource in Black communities.

OBMA should meet with the Boston Housing Authority, the second largest public agency in Boston, to review how Section 3 can be maximized to benefit Black men and their communities.

The BHA has a staff dedicated to enhancing the impact of Section 3, and opening communications with the OBMA would be consistent with its mission. The BHA lets many contracts to developers for example, where adherence to Section 3 may be required. These BHA developments should be more accessible to Black men, in public housing surrounding communities, who are seeking employment opportunities. But Section 3 can also be utilized to generate contracts for Black men who own or want to start businesses.

As is the suggestion about apprenticeships above, OMBA might consider playing a conduit role between it, and its clientele of Black men and boys with City Academy and SuccessLink Employment Partners. Staff of these two initiatives can introduce (or re-introduce) the work of OMBA to its many community partners.

³² <https://www.hud.gov/section3/>

Public Health and Public Safety: Expanding Internships at Local Community Health Centers

Potential partner sectors: community health centers; hospitals; public health programs and initiatives; other.

11 Community health agencies should be approached about recruiting Black youth as paid interns during the summer and throughout the school year. Perhaps community health centers could assist with leading this effort. Without violating medical or ethical requirements or protocols, student interns can begin to understand the health challenges facing the Black community in Boston. Student interns are an important part of recruiting and developing skilled workers and preparing the workforce for the future. These student interns will begin to understand the health challenges facing the Black community in Boston by assisting community health workers who function as a bridge between their communities and the health care and social service systems. Student interns will learn to build trusting relationships and learn about the lives of local patients, the resources and needs of their communities, and the barriers they face to being as healthy as possible.

12 Community health centers should partner with OBMA and the Commission to organize public campaigns for individuals to check on each other, their friends, neighbors, and families in terms of everyday needs. Campaigns should also be organized in partnership with public schools to educate communities about a ‘right to wellness.’ Public education such as cooking classes, gardening, and reading clubs should be widely available at times convenient for people to participate. All these activities can also be supported by paid internships. These kinds of campaigns may be ongoing, so the key would be how to target such to Black men and boys and where they reside.



Greater Involvement with Civic Engagement and Community Organizing

Potential partner sectors: foundations; community organizing; civic training; voter registration and education; public schools; other.

13

The civic engagement activities of the OBMA should continue and be expanded. OBMA should meet with voter registration organizations to discuss how it can enhance the presence of Black men and boys in these efforts. Participation in voter registration and civic education workshops/activities should be supported. OBMA should invite organizations involved in this area to share materials or announcements they can share with Commission members and others.

14

OBMA and the Commission could encourage Black-led and community-based organizations to strategize about how to meet periodically to discuss increasing the participation of Black men and boys in civic and electoral activities. There should be a major voter registration drive and data about who is registered, who is not, should be collected independently by some organization. Again, this is not an activity that the OBMA can take on, but rather play a facilitative role.



15 Philanthropic organizations should be retained to 1) collect information about available philanthropic initiatives or resources which would directly or indirectly benefit community-based organizations working with Black men and boys.

16 OBMA should seek to expand its Young Black Leaders Boston initiative by covering a range of civic life. For example, OBMA should advocate for Black men and boys to be involved in historic preservation. Roxbury, for example, includes six historic districts: Dudley Station Historic District; Eustis Street Architectural Conservation District; John Eliot Sq. Historic District; Moreland Street Historic District; Mount Pleasant Historic District; and the Roxbury Highlands Historic District.



Stronger Targeted Connections with Boston Public Schools

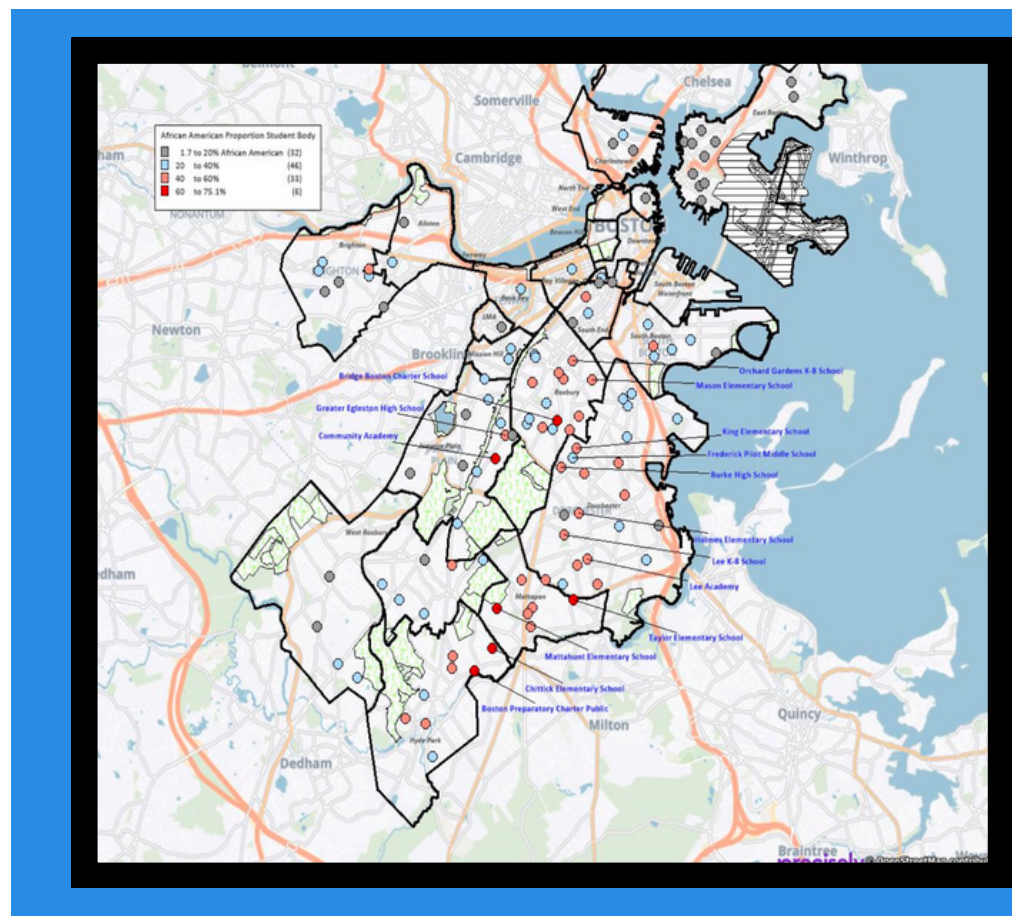
Potential partner sectors: public and charter schools; parent organizations; student advocacy groups; apprenticeship programs; other.

17 OBMA should invite school leaders or appropriate staff from a small number of public schools with a high proportion of Black youth to meet as a group. The purpose of this meeting would be to 1) orient this group about OBMA and its ongoing work; 2) consider how individual public schools might assist the work of OBMA and vice-versa. This can be done under the R.E.A.C.H 1000 Mentoring initiative.

18 There should be some consideration for using a more targeted approach in working with a smaller collaboration of Boston public schools. A collaborative network of schools with significantly higher proportions of Black students may have greater impacts. This would not be exclusive, but rather more focused on these individual schools. A collaborative schools might also lead to stronger networks and cross school communication about issues facing Black male students. If this kind of approach proves effective, then it can be expanded to other schools.

31 See, Ed Gaston, Executive Director of the Greater Boston Chamber of Commerce, "We need a plan to Boost the Number of Black Tech Entrepreneurs in Boston" DigBoston, (March 2022); also earlier, "We Must Increase the Number of Black Founded Tech Companies in Mass. Here's How" DigBoston, (November 22, 2021).

The following map shows the African American students (male and female) as proportion of the entire student body in individual Boston public schools.³³ There are six public schools where the African American student proportion is 60% or greater. Thirty-three public schools reported an African American student body of between forty (40.0) and sixty (60.0) percent. OBMA should select a small number of schools that are geographically close to each other and then reach out to the principals of these schools.



A few schools with high proportions of African American students could be targeted for special attention and the building of partnerships.

A scenario with a lot of potential benefits would require commitment on the part of BPS leadership to plan or sponsor a consortium of these particular schools aimed at a) sharing information and insights about challenges facing Black male students in these schools; b) consider a partnership between the proposed consortium and the OBMA to discuss strategies for improving academic achievement in these places; and, c) consider strategies that would expand partnerships between the proposed consortium and community-based organizations and nonprofits serving these parts of the neighborhood. This can be designed as a model or prototype on a smaller scale that can be scaled up as the impact of the action step is assessed.

³³ See, Ed Gaston, Executive Director of the Greater Grove Hall Main Streets: “We need a plan to Boost the Number of Black Tech Entrepreneurs in Boston” DigBoston, (March 4, 2022); also earlier, “We Must Increase the Number of Black-Founded Tech Companies in Mass. Here’s How” DigBoston, (November 22, 2021).

Potential partner sectors: restorative justice programs; veterans assistance; housing advocacy; job training; legal assistance; other.

Identifying and eliminating of CORI obstacles to individual and group economic mobility

19

OBMA should seek to expand the Project Opportunity initiative and increase outreach activities. Unless it already exists, OBMA should issue a brief report or update describing Project Opportunity activities.

20

OBMA should schedule a meeting with Greater Boston Legal Services regarding the *Update After Criminal Justice Reform* report.³⁴ The meeting should focus on introducing the work of OBMA, but also assessing progress or lack of progress regarding CORI reforms.

CORI, or “Criminal Offender Record Information” remains an obstacle for many Black youth. And as noted in a recent report by the MAPC, *State of Equity for Metro Boston Policy Agenda Update* (February 2018), many CORIs are for minor offenses! These youth can face enormous obstacles to acquiring productive economic experiences in the forms of jobs or credit. Black communities tend to be concentrated in residential pockets throughout Boston, so this is also an economic challenge for the entire community. Individuals with CORI face multilayered-economic and housing barriers to fair housing, and in numerous cases, these individuals are also family members, thus impacting low-income households.³⁵

³⁴ Greater Boston Legal Services, *KNOW YOUR CORI RIGHTS - SEALING AND EXPUNGEMENT OF CRIMINAL OFFENDER RECORD INFORMATION (CORI)*, 2018 Update after Criminal Justice Reform at: <https://www.masslegalhelp.org/cori/know-your-rights-booklet.pdf>.

³⁵ Also see, Metropolitan Area Planning Council’s *State of Equity for Metro Boston Policy Agenda Update* (February 2018): “Criminal Offender Record Information (CORI) forms continue to be a barrier for individuals who enter or return to the workforce after a criminal case. It is not only an employment barrier but can also limit an individual’s eligibility for certain state assistance programs and their economic independence and socio-economic mobility.” p.27.



Conclusion

Moving Forward

The OBMA should utilize both a targeted and place-based approach in the implementation of new action steps. One report states that effective strategies must “Ensure a strong focus on the target population.”³⁶ But place-based efforts can limit such focus: “More prevalent, but less specifically targeted toward young black males, are place-based efforts that seek to improve outcomes in disadvantaged neighborhoods with a large share of poor and minority residents.”³⁷ However, if focus on Black males is not lost or limited, then place-based approaches can generate stronger partnerships with community-based organizations and public schools.

Whatever strategies or actions steps are proposed, it is important to be intentional about reaching and serving Black men and boys. Universal approaches, or silo-ed program service delivery will not be as effective as more streamlined targeted and comprehensive approaches. As recommended in the report by Wolk and Jennings, as a first strategic priority: “Ensure a deliberate, shared focus on Black and Latino boys and young men. Ensuring a deliberate, explicit focus across the Boston support landscape can function as a central lever to drive organizations to improve life outcomes for Black and Latino boys and young men. As seen in the survey results, there remains a gap between direct support for this demographic and a deliberate focus on maximizing the success of this constituency.”³⁸

With adequate resources and working with the Commission, the OBMA can sponsor inter-sector meetings to consider proposed action steps briefly described in this Report. The OBMA can fill a vacuum and provide a niche in corralling resources for Black men and boys. It can also be a forum: where roundtables to bring key actors together can be held. In addition to this kind of tool, OBMA can call for, and/or assist with collecting information about available resources in various areas.

OBMA should consider building and expanding communication with community partners who can assist with 1) continuing to raise community and public awareness on the need to elevate a range of opportunities for Black men and boys; 2) obtaining funding from foundations, the private sector, or the government, to assist in implementing next action steps for the OBMA and the Commission; and 3) sharing information and resources between organizations to expand impact.

³⁶ National League of Cities, p.5.

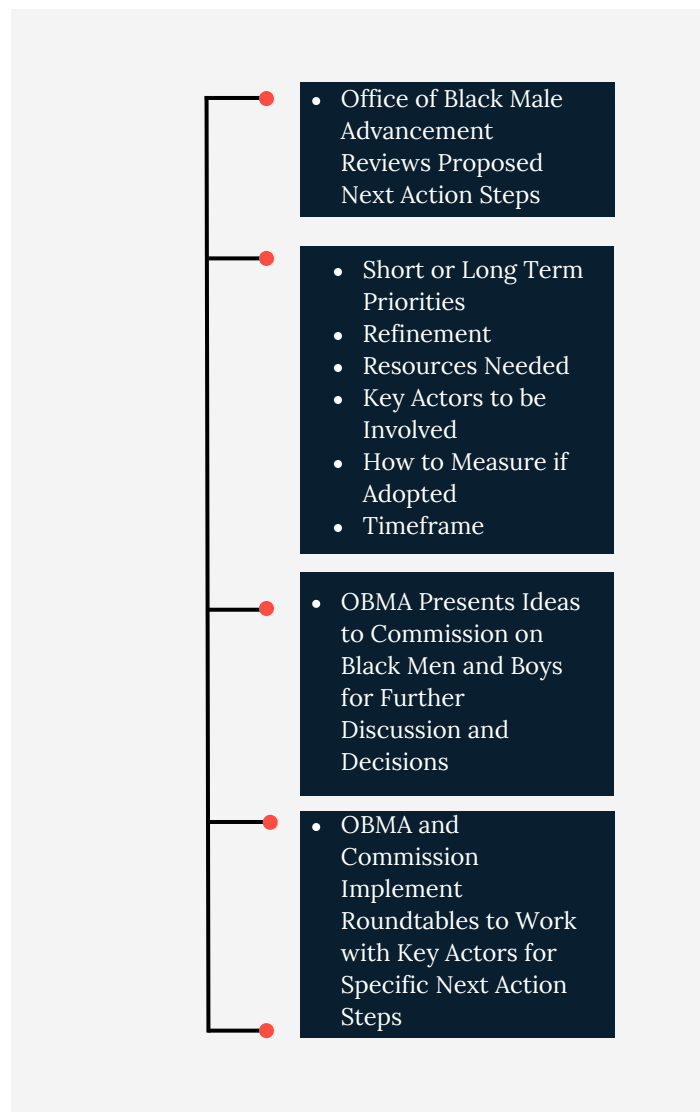
³⁷ Ibid. p.4.

³⁸ Andrew Wolk and James Jennings, Mapping Momentum for Boston's Youth: Programs & Opportunities for Black and Latino Young Men (2016), p.28; at: <https://rootcause.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/05/Mapping-Momentum-for-Bostons-Youth.pdf>.

This has already started to happen through OBMA’s Community Empowerment Small Grant Fund, where it has provided resources to sixty community organizations. If there are future rounds of funding, then the call for grant applications could be in response to the next action steps prioritized by OBMA and the Commission. In other words, OBMA could ask which organizations would be interested in tackling one or two action steps. This is a similar strategy described in an earlier report on MBK Boston: “MBK Boston might consider utilizing themes in its future grant-making or organizing activities or encouraging current and future grantees to consider thematic approaches. For example, themes such as ‘entrepreneurship’ or cultural consciousness ‘or “enhancing community civic involvement”, or “reaching out to elders’, or ‘working with other youth of color in your community’, etc.”³⁹ Essentially, OBMA should use these kinds of funds to be a driver in ensuring that adopted action steps are implemented by appropriate organizations or coalitions. This does not violate the backbone or anchor role for OBMA described earlier.

The following chart illustrates the phases for prioritizing and implementing the next action steps adopted.

The chart shows that the OBMA would review and vet the proposed next action steps in terms of short or long-term priorities; necessary refinement; resources needed; key actors to be involved; how to measure if adopted; and time for implementation. Its findings would be presented to the Commission for further discussion and decisions. The OBMA and the Commission would then sponsor meetings to collaborate with key actors involved with specific next action steps.



³⁹ <https://sites.tufts.edu/jamesjennings/files/2018/06/reportsPreliminaryAssessmentMBKBOSTON2017.pdf>, p.16

Again, action steps are not meant necessarily for direct OBMA or Commission implementation. OBMA's key role should be to facilitate meetings between it, the Commission and potential community partners about specific action steps. A potential role for OBMA would be to plan small meetings with potential partners who can help meet the next action steps. The purposes of the meetings would be to:

Discuss

Discuss next action steps with potential partners based on specific categories below, and that are prioritized by the OBMA and the Commission.

Share

Share information about available resources.

Gain

Gain insights on how to reach and empower Black men and boys; and,

Support

Support the potential partners to seek external funding for implementation of some next action steps.

Commission members would be invited to participate in these meetings and to offer suggestions about potential partners. The meetings could be facilitated by OBMA or a Commission member. Planning and implementing convenings does require resources in terms of staff time, follow-up, and assessing impacts. OBMA must be assured of adequate resources to expand its backbone or anchor organization role.

Action steps adopted should be segmented in ways that reflect significant developmental and experiential differences among Black men and boys aged 8 years to 55 years of age. Black men and boys are multidimensional by age, schooling levels, economic, and educational characteristics. However, this does not preclude that certain kinds of actions aimed at one age group would not be beneficial to others. For example, action steps to improve the job prospects or wages of older Black men can certainly have a positive impact on this group, and at the same time positively impact younger Black men who are in their families or live in their communities.

Finally, as a ‘backbone’ organization bringing together potential partnerships and collaborative initiatives, there should be a ‘State of Black Men and Boys’ convening periodically.⁴⁰ The purpose of the convening should be to a) share information about challenges and resources; b) consider partnerships in implementing specific action steps; and c) determine what kinds of data and information about Black men and boys are needed for planning continuing services and resources.

⁴⁰ Based on the founding work of Hubie Jones, Higher Ground in Roxbury has emerged as a leading backbone organization model connecting the needs of children across housing, health, and public education; Charlie Titus, a member of the Commission, is also Chair of the Higher Ground Board. Also see MBK EQUITY FRAMEWORK: MBK Blueprint for Transformation, Success & Long-Term Sustainability, p.70

Appendix

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