

## Organizational Background

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The Twenty-First Century Foundation (21CF) is a national, public foundation with a mission to advance strategic Black philanthropy aimed at having a positive impact on social and economic issues in the Black community. Founded in 1971, by the eminent economist and philanthropist Robert S. Browne, the Twenty-First Century Foundation makes grants to support Black leadership development, economic empowerment, and community organizing focused on social justice. The Foundation has supported more than 350 community-based organizations that make a difference in the lives of Black children, families, and communities throughout the country. In addition to grant making, the Foundation has an education program for donors who want to develop the skills, commitment, and imagination to make a significant contribution to pressing causes within the Black community.

## The Twenty-First Century Foundation's Theory of Change

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The Twenty-First Century Foundation believes that true systems change occurs both from the bottom up and the top down. The main methodology by which most sustainable change happens is through building power—organized people and organized money, and organized media—and using it to make positive social change. It is with this understanding that 21CF emphasizes 1) donor education and organizing, and 2) grantmaking focused on community organizing, and advocacy. This work supplements and improves the effectiveness of direct service and empowerment strategies by mobilizing significant numbers of people and resources to build a sustained and consistent base of power focused on strategies that address the systemic issues of social inequity. This approach also supports building collaborative relationships that link local, regional, and national efforts horizontally and vertically across issues using a variety of complementary strategies to connect grassroots community-based efforts with policies that effect broader systemic change.

## The Black Men and Boys Initiative

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The Black Men and Boys Initiative is designed to identify, highlight and support effective strategies that focus on supporting Black men and boys and to surface new sources of support from individual donors and institutional philanthropy to supplement this effort.

The goals of the Black Men and Boys Initiative (BMB) are to:

- 1) Provide strategic grants aimed at addressing the roots causes of problems facing Black men and boys;
- 2) Raise the visibility of critical issues facing Black men and boys nationally in a way that leads to substantive action; and
- 3) Leverage additional financial support dedicated to strategies that view Black men and boys as assets.

The planning and exploration phase of the Initiative included six key steps:

- 1) A “landscape analysis,” was conducted to describe, synthesize, and analyze various views and data on what is happening within the United States in the area of Black men and boys.
- 2) Roundtable discussions with key stakeholders were held in four cities – Chicago, Los Angeles, New York City, and Oakland – in which support would initially be targeted.
- 3) Development breakfasts and receptions targeted toward individuals with wealth in each city were held to build initial awareness of and support for the Initiative among local supporters.
- 4) The Black Men and Boys Fund was established to begin the process of grantmaking to organizations working with Black men and boys.
- 5) Feedback from this entire process was compiled into an interim report to provide stakeholders with a draft strategy and program plan for action on the part of the Foundation.
- 6) Input on the interim report was collected through a second series of roundtable discussions in each city, and the results were compiled into this final report, which includes a proposed plan of action for the Foundation.

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## SUMMARY OF THE FINAL REPORT

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The full report is a synthesis of the national landscape analysis, interviews, two rounds of local roundtables and development event discussions, and an assessment of the initial round of grantmaking. Below is a brief summary of the key findings outlined in the report and recommendations for the Foundation's BMB Initiative.

The initial process surfaced five key areas of concern for Black men and boys:



**Education** – Addresses the myriad educational challenges facing Black boys from birth through college, including drop out and suspension rates, access to appropriate educational opportunities, and high school attendance, retention, and graduation rates.



**Employment & Economic Sustainability** – Highlights the need to create new jobs, increase current living wages to meet basic quality-of-life standards, promote skill and professional development, and address barriers to accessing employment and legitimate income-and asset-building opportunities.



**Criminal Justice** – Identify efforts designed to change policies that facilitate the disproportionate imprisonment of Black men and boys, and which support the civil and human rights struggle of former prisoners re-entering their communities.



**Fatherhood Support** – Encourages efforts that support rather than punish fathers seeking to be engaged and/or re-united with their families.



**Health** – Addresses the pressing issues of health including the prevalence of life-threatening and chronic disease, untreated and under-diagnosed mental illness, violence, and the limited access to appropriate and sufficient health care.

Within the framework of these five key issue areas, the perspectives expressed in the full report are wide-ranging and insightful. Below is a summary of the key trends and issues surfaced during this process.

- Black male-focused approaches are not being attacked so there is an opportunity for positive work.
- The globalization of Black culture is powerful.
- Institutional racism remains a factor in the plight of Black men and boys.
- Class drives a wedge between upper- and middle- class and working-class and poor Blacks.
- A tension exists between notions of individual versus societal responsibility.
- There is a need to reaffirm a collective vision and sense of mutual accountability within the Black community.
- The media plays a critical role in shaping public perceptions of Black men and boys.
- Internalized oppression has hampered the progress of many Black men and boys.
- The anger within many Black men and boys is deep and unaddressed.
- In spite of strong leadership committed to Black men and boys, the pool of leadership is shallow, and new styles of leadership are needed.
- Re-enforcing institutions within the Black community have weakened influence.
- Fundamental, systemic socio-economic barriers remain.
- The impact of incarceration is multi-faceted and far ranging.

In response to these trends and issues, there was widespread agreement that an emphasis on this constituency was crucial and that there is a need to:

- Clarify and address the inter-connectedness between the five key issues;
- Connect advocacy with policy, organizing, and education;
- Draw upon and learn from both successful and unsuccessful strategies;
- Reinforce the role of culture in addressing the issue;
- Provide a space to discuss, assess, and develop a collective vision to address class divisions and the implications of same;
- Develop a collective media response to challenge negative images of Black men and boys;
- Support efforts to connect local work with national issues and strategies; and
- Work with existing national entities such as the Congressional Black Caucus, the NAACP, the Urban League, “hip-hop generation” institutions, education institutions, etc., to draw on a broad spectrum of resources and strategic perspectives.

## Proposed Strategies and Recommendations

Based on this process, the Foundation identified the following potential roles it could play in promoting solutions to issues facing this constituency:

- Create a philosophical framework for the Initiative that outlines a “theory of change,” promotes positive ways of supporting Black men and boys, rejects misogyny and homophobia, and builds an inclusive, communal, affirming, and integrated approach for addressing the specific needs of this constituency;
- Conduct grantmaking that supports interdependent institutions and inspires innovation and field development;

- Act as a clearinghouse to gather and disseminate information about existing sound practices and to identify gaps where more work or exploration is needed;
- Leverage money for groups and the larger movement and help donors realize their options for targeted investments;
- Support the development of an infrastructure that supports this constituency, provides both horizontal and vertical links, and builds leadership; and
- Act as a convener and honest broker for discussions and problem-solving around the issue.

Specifically, over the next five years, The Twenty-First Century Foundation will:

- Provided multi-year grants to organizations
- Support and facilitate regional strategies including:
  - Ongoing convenings that may develop into local policy/organizing efforts
  - Grantmaking for neighborhood-based collaboratives, with a particular emphasis on public education and increasing the high school graduation rates for Black boys
- Facilitate a national conversation among existing efforts to amplify this work, uncover common ground, and support potential areas of collaboration
- Fund and/or incubate Black Men and Boys research and action institutes in each pilot city
- Create a national inventory of existing BMB programs and best practices
- Explore the development and launch of a national BMB media campaign
- Mobilize Black donors and volunteers to leverage funds and resources within and on behalf of the Black community to support local and national efforts
- Plan and conduct an ongoing evaluation to assess the impact of the Initiative on improving the lives of Black men and boys.