CHANGING PLACES
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HOW COMMUNITIES WILL IMPROVE
THE HEALTH OF BOYS OF COLOR

Edited by Christopher Edley Jr.
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The Chief Justice Earl Warren Institute on Race, Ethnicity and Diversity at the University of California at Berkeley School of Law is a multidisciplinary, collaborative venture to produce research, research-based policy analysis, and curricular innovation on issues of racial and ethnic justice in California and the nation.

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MINDING THE GAP

Strategic Philanthropy and the Crisis among Black Young Men and Boys

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ABSTRACT

Since the early 1980s, two parallel trends have contributed significantly to the transformation of social, political, and economic life in America: (1) the steady decline in the life outcomes of black young men and boys; and (2) the explosion of new philanthropic activity in the wake of enormous newly created wealth. This chapter explores how present-day philanthropists have responded to the crisis among black young men and boys. Based on an analysis of quantitative data on foundation grant-making and qualitative data from interviews with foundation officers as well as our personal observations from more than two decades of combined experience working with foundation leaders, we document three major periods of foundation investment related to black young men and boys since 1990. Recognizing the crucial work of entrepreneurial program officers, we observe that funding has fluctuated significantly across these periods but failed to reach necessary levels. We also note particularly low levels of investment among “new” philanthropists who entered the field after 1980.

Exploring these findings, we outline three general barriers to foundation investment: the challenges involved in directly addressing race and gender in the United States; foundation staff’s reluctance to take on a highly complex social problem with few proven solutions; and the absence of sustained institutional support. We identify a specific barrier to new philanthropic funding—strategic-planning methods designed to maximize impact and “value for money.” Using a hypothetical case study, we demonstrate how strategic-planning methods may systematically disadvantage black young
men and boys as targeted recipients of philanthropic investment. Cautioning that strategic-planning methods are quickly becoming standard foundation practice, we conclude the chapter with seven concrete recommendations for overcoming these general and specific barriers to increased funding.

INTRODUCTION

Since the early 1980s, two parallel trends have contributed significantly to the transformation of social, political, and economic life in America: (1) the steady decline in the life outcomes of black young men and boys; and (2) the explosion of new philanthropic activity in the wake of enormous newly created wealth. The decline in black men’s life chances during this period is well documented and still shocking. By the year 2000—in the wake of two decades of deindustrialization, changes in sentencing law, and reform of welfare and child-support laws—a black man in his thirties stood nearly twice the chance of serving prison time (22 percent) than of earning a bachelor of arts degree (12 percent). In contrast, white men faced only a 3 percent likelihood of incarceration and a 32 percent chance of earning a BA.¹

This deterioration of opportunity among black men occurred at the same time that the U.S. economy was expanding at an astounding rate, driven by rapid growth in the technology, finance, and real estate sectors. Massive fortunes were built, fueling the growth of the super rich, and leading to ever-increasing levels of income and wealth inequality. This era of economic expansion culminated in a period of enormous growth in private philanthropy as the era’s most successful businesspeople began to give away their fortunes. The value of the endowments of charitable foundations skyrocketed in sync with the stock market. Between 1980 and 2007 the number of foundations operating in the United States more than tripled—from twenty-two thousand to seventy-five thousand—and the combined value of their assets increased sharply from $100 billion to $680 billion.²

The question that informs this chapter is whether these two trends intersect, and if so, how: specifically, how has this latest generation of philanthropists and foundation leaders responded to the crisis among black young men and boys, a crisis that developed in tandem with the growth of their own fortunes and endowments? Many philanthropists have dedicated themselves to tackling an array of social issues affecting the most disadvantaged people in American society, including education, health, employment, and poverty. While in theory these areas support work with black young
men and boys, there has been a surprising lack of explicit investment in this highly vulnerable population. This chapter seeks to provide an overview of the crisis facing black men and boys, to suggest that targeted investment in this population is required, and to identify barriers that have prevented such investment. We also propose a set of recommendations designed to improve present-day philanthropy’s ability to meet this challenge.

Although this chapter focuses on philanthropic foundations, we acknowledge that the foundation is only one of a range of institutional actors needed to effectively address a crisis of this proportion—and almost certainly not the most influential. As previous contributions in this collection have made clear, effective solutions to this crisis will require the coordinated activities of all three sectors of the economy: government, business, and nonprofit. We are acutely aware that foundation resources are dwarfed by those of both the government and the private sector. Furthermore, other nonprofit organizations (such as community-based direct service providers, community organizing groups, and religious institutions) are arguably more central than foundations to addressing the challenges faced by black young men and boys. Despite these limitations, however, foundations can play a unique and absolutely essential role in solving the current crisis. Foundation dollars have the potential to represent society’s “risk capital”; freed from the constraints of politics or the market, foundations can address “unpopular” issues that others are unwilling or unable to take on. They can also pursue opportunities that have a potentially huge payoff but carry a high risk of failure. Finally, foundation dollars represent one of the very few sources of funding that can be used to strengthen nonprofit organizational capacity and support field-building activities.

Foundations have historically fulfilled this role by tackling some of the nation’s most intractable social issues, stepping in as an essential voice and resource when others have thought it too risky. In the context of race and poverty, foundation actions have been far-reaching. In the post–Civil War South, for example, the Rockefeller Foundation supported the establishment of new elementary, secondary, and postsecondary schools for African Americans, including Morehouse College and Spelman College. During the 1940s the Carnegie Foundation funded sociologist Gunnar Myrdal to write his seminal work on race in America. In the 1960s and 1970s—in the wake of white flight, riots, and massive disinvestment—the Ford Foundation invested heavily in rebuilding and strengthening poor, urban neighborhoods; since then, Ford has supported the nonprofit infrastructure of civil rights advocacy groups, including the NAACP Legal Defense and Educational Fund, the Lawyers Committee for Civil Rights Under Law, the
Mexican American Legal Defense and Education Fund, and the National Council of La Raza.\(^5\)

None of these foundations can claim to have brought about change single-handedly, however, or even come close to solving the big problems they attempted to tackle. But they did offer the money, platform, and public support to voices and organizations that likely would not have found support elsewhere and that ultimately were essential to catalyzing large-scale social change. Throughout this chapter we explore how contemporary foundations are meeting the latest challenge in the multicentury struggle to dismantle a race-based caste system in the United States.

**OVERVIEW OF THE CRISIS AND A CALL TO ACTION**

The depth of the crisis among black boys and men—and the level of suffering and diminution of opportunity it embodies—is devastating, calling for a forceful, coordinated, long-term response from the public, private, and nonprofit sectors. This population faces unacceptably high probabilities of academic failure, chronic unemployment, and incarceration. The accumulation of disadvantage begins in the public education system, where black boys are increasingly concentrated in segregated, high-poverty schools that lack the instructional resources that matter most to teaching and learning. Trapped in failing schools, 42 percent of all black boys fall at least one full grade behind.\(^6\)

Black boys are increasingly being pushed out of these schools. Although they account for 9 percent of total enrollment in the nation’s elementary and secondary schools, they make up 22 percent of total expulsions.\(^7\) By the time they reach high school, fewer than one in two (43 percent) will graduate on time.\(^8\) In urban areas their high-school graduation rates are even lower. In Milwaukee and Baltimore, for example, fewer than one in three young black men graduates (32 percent and 31 percent, respectively). As adolescents and adults, young black men struggle to connect to jobs and find a path out of poverty. In 2004, 72 percent of black male high-school dropouts in their twenties were jobless, compared with 34 percent of white dropouts. Even when high-school graduates were included, half of black men in their twenties were jobless.\(^9\) And as the likelihood of finding a job decreased among black men, their likelihood of being incarcerated in state or federal prison skyrocketed. Incarceration rates climbed throughout the 1980s and 1990s, reaching historic highs in recent years.\(^10\) During this period the incarceration rate for black men in their early thirties doubled; one in five of these men now have a history of incarceration. Among less-educated black men, the
increase in the probability of incarceration was especially steep. In 1980, 17 percent of black male high-school dropouts in their early thirties had been incarcerated; by 2000 nearly 60 percent (58 percent) had been imprisoned.\textsuperscript{11}

The contrast between the expansion of incarceration among this population and the reduction in educational, work, and civic opportunities is stark. In 2000, among black dropouts in their late twenties, more were in prison on a given day (34 percent) than were working (30 percent).\textsuperscript{12} Today, more black men receive their GED in prison than graduate from college.\textsuperscript{13} In certain states, such as Florida and Alabama, 30 percent of black men are disenfranchised as a result of having a felony conviction.\textsuperscript{14} Mass incarceration, a failing public school system, ongoing family disintegration, and chronic unemployment have formed a juggernaut that crushes the promise of opportunity for this population, leaving an unacceptable number of black men—especially those with low levels of education—disconnected from family, school, and work.

As a society—at an individual, community, institutional, and national level—we must decide whether it is acceptable for any race and/or gender group to face these odds. A life defined by these parameters is robbed of hope and possibility. Simply put, to consign men of a certain racial group to this fate is inconsistent with basic notions of justice, equity, and fairness. When one group in society is so thoroughly marginalized and excluded, democracy is seriously weakened, exposing a gaping hole in what remains of the frayed social contract. There is a moral imperative to take action to change the life chances for black boys and men. For the United States to tolerate these conditions is to abandon its commitment to a shared fate and a common destiny. But even if one rejects the moral call to action based on equity, democracy, and justice, the enormous social costs of this crisis should engender a response. The impact of this crisis on low-income black families, children, and communities is devastating. The spillover effects of crime and violence, the cost of incarceration and increased use of public services, the loss of a potentially productive labor force and forgone tax revenue, and the decreases in civic participation and political stability are overwhelming and affect all Americans.\textsuperscript{15} The potential benefits accrued by avoiding even a fraction of these costs justify immediate action and investment.

THE CURRENT RESPONSE OF FOUNDATIONS TO THE CRISIS

To examine the response of today’s foundations to the current crisis, we analyzed quantitative data on grants awarded since the early 1990s and
qualitative data from one-on-one interviews with experienced foundation program staff involved with current and past initiatives that have targeted black young men and boys. We also reviewed relevant reports, evaluations, and research articles available through the Foundation Center and online. To provide an overview of philanthropic giving among regional and smaller national foundations, we relied on existing published reviews by the Ford Foundation and the Association of Black Foundation Executives (ABFE). Across these sources we identified foundation initiatives aimed at black young men and boys in current and historical grant making over the past two decades. To examine the broader landscape of the recent funding patterns of foundations, we reviewed the past seven years of giving records of the country’s fifty largest national grant-making foundations.

In amassing this body of data, we included only those initiatives that specifically and explicitly targeted this population as both black and male. Foundation initiatives that were in theory intended to benefit black young men and boys as part of attempts to serve a larger population of disadvantaged individuals—such as efforts to reform K–12 public education systems serving low-income and minority youth, or the development of housing solutions for the chronically homeless—were included only if they appeared to explicitly apply a race and gender lens. We applied these strict criteria because empirical evidence suggests that the crisis demands an integrated response that directly targets the specific needs of these men and boys. More universal strategies intended to reform the education or health system for all disadvantaged Americans are urgently needed and are an important part of the solution to the crisis, but these efforts will likely leave black young men and boys behind unless they are coupled with targeted strategies that specifically address the unique and interrelated dynamics affecting this group—including the impact of gendered racial discrimination in schools and the job market, early criminalization and incarceration, pervasive structural violence and trauma, the dearth of fathers and male role models, and cultural norms around race and masculinity.

We found a moderate amount of funding focused explicitly on black men and boys, averaging approximately $8.6 million per year in real 2009 dollars ($5.4 million unadjusted), with significant variation across time. Overall, funding grew in the early 1990s, peaking sharply in 1997, when foundations committed an unprecedented $60 million ($35 million) to the crisis. Funding dropped to pre-1997 levels the subsequent year but maintained a steady pace of growth throughout the late 1990s and early 2000s, peaking once again in 2001 at $11 million ($8 million). Funding fell sharply
after 2003 to a low of around $2.5 million ($2 million) per year through 2005. After a jump to around $4 million ($4 million) in 2006, funding levels stayed relatively constant through 2008, but picked up again in 2009 to $5 million ($5 million). Newer foundations begun after 1980 were less likely to fund targeted initiatives than their older counterparts begun before that year. We expand on each of these findings in turn.

HISTORICAL TRENDS

Qualitative interviews and review of program materials suggest that this body of foundation work can be broken down into three historically distinct periods since 1990: the early 1990s through 2002, 2003 through 2005, and 2006 through the present.20

The Early 1990s through 2002:
Funding Black Men as Fathers

With the support of a number of large national foundations, this period focused primarily on addressing the needs of black men as fathers. This spotlight grew out of research from the mid-1980s and early 1990s that revealed the erosion of job opportunities for less-educated black men as the United States shifted from a manufacturing to a service-based economy. Such academics as William Julius Wilson documented how lost employment opportunities contributed to rapidly dwindling numbers of “marriageable” black men—that is, men with stable jobs and decent incomes—in working-class black communities.21 This in turn fueled the growth of single-parent families and contributed to the increase in child poverty rates and a host of other negative outcomes associated with diminished access to the emotional and financial resources available to children raised in two-parent families. Emerging from this research, fatherhood programs of the early 1990s attempted to reverse these trends by increasing employment opportunities for custodial fathers, decreasing disincentives to work, bolstering parenting skills, and helping men to navigate an increasingly punitive child support–enforcement system. For some funders “fatherhood” was a useful euphemism for discussing the needs of black men, as the parenting emphasis connected them to a more vulnerable and sympathetic group of poor children in the eyes of funders, policymakers, and the public.22

By the early 1990s the fatherhood framework had gained substantial mainstream traction as a result of a sympathetic administration and highly
publicized events (for example, the Million Man March in 1995 and the growth of groups like the Promise Keepers) that helped to raise the public’s awareness and popularize fatherhood and fathers’ rights as issues. The Clinton administration incorporated this framework into its welfare reform efforts. By the mid-1990s the fatherhood agenda had made significant inroads into large philanthropy. In 1994, Ron Mincy, a leading scholar of African American men and boys, joined the Ford Foundation from the Urban Institute, bringing a commitment to finding a leading role for philanthropy in a broader movement around fatherhood.

At Ford, Mincy spearheaded the design and implementation of the Strengthening Fragile Families Initiative, a $52 million ($30 million unadjusted), seven-year effort. The initiative was intended to affect large-scale systems change, deliver appropriate and effective services through an array of programs, and improve outcomes for parents and children in low-income families. By targeting the way public agencies and community organizations work with unmarried families, the initiative also aimed to increase the capacity of young, economically disadvantaged fathers to provide financial and emotional support for their children, reducing poverty and welfare dependence as a result. Two other large foundations—the Annie E. Casey Foundation and the Charles Stewart Mott Foundation—joined with Ford to form a funders’ collective for fathers and families.

From 1994 through 2003 two of the foundations from this funding collective, Ford and Mott, provided support for a large-scale longitudinal study of fragile families; for extensive policy work at the federal, state, and local levels to reform welfare with a focus on child support provisions; and for the planning, implementation, and evaluation of sixteen demonstration sites nationwide. In addition, the foundations undertook an ambitious effort to create a new fatherhood “field” by seeding and building a number of large national intermediaries (for example, the National Center on Fathers and Families at the University of Pennsylvania; the Center for Fathers, Families, and Public Policy; and the National Practitioners Network for Fathers and Families). The foundations also supported and convened practitioners and scholars, and documented and distributed best practices.

Shortly before the Ford, Mott, and Casey foundations began their fatherhood work, the W. K. Kellogg Foundation had initiated a separate effort that directly addressed the challenges black men and boys faced. Between 1992 and 1997 the foundation invested more than $17 million ($8.5 million unadjusted) in an African-American Men and Boys Initiative. Designed and led by prominent scholar Bobby Austin, the effort focused on two main issues: the delivery of effective, multilayered services and leadership
development. Most significantly, funding established the National Task Force on African-American Males in 1992. In 1996 the task force issued its report, *Repairing the Breach: Key Ways to Support Family Life, Reclaim Our Streets, and Rebuild Civil Society in America’s Communities*, which offered a set of recommendations designed to resolve the problems faced by young black men and boys in the United States.

The impact of both the fatherhood work and Kellogg’s pioneering efforts was significant. The Fragile Families work in particular spurred crucial changes in the ways welfare, child support, and family support systems treated low-income, noncustodial fathers. These efforts increased public-sector awareness of the difference between so-called “deadbeat” dads (divorced fathers who had jobs and were willfully refusing to pay child support) and “dead broke” dads (fathers who had never married their child’s mother and were often jobless). In addition, they exposed the perverse incentives embedded in child support enforcement laws that worked to distance poor, noncustodial fathers from their children and the legitimate labor force.

The foundations leveraged millions of dollars in federal funds to support a set of demonstration projects that documented the positive effects of well-designed programs on job opportunities, earnings, and child support payments among noncustodial fathers. The projects produced less evidence, however, that improved outcomes for black fathers translated into better outcomes for their children. The work of Kellogg, in particular, resulted in the growth of a number of innovative community-level programs as well as the launch of the Village Foundation, the first foundation focused solely on the needs of black boys and men. Opened in 1997 with multimillion-dollar support from Kellogg, the Village Foundation was dedicated to “repairing the breach” between African American males and the rest of society by reconnecting them first to their local communities and then to the larger society.

**2003–2005: National Funding Drought and Regional Boom**

During the second distinct funding period, philanthropic funding for work focusing on black men and boys dwindled dramatically, decreasing from a post-1997 high of $11 million ($8 million unadjusted) in 2001 to $2.5 million ($2 million unadjusted) from 2003 through 2005. Although a couple of major funders, such as Mott and to a lesser extent Annie E. Casey, continued to fund fatherhood projects targeted at black men, the largest
national foundations, such as Ford and Kellogg, left the field. In the wake of this exit, much of the institutional capacity that had been created during the past decade disintegrated. A recent follow-up study of fifty-one organizations that served black men and boys in 1995 profiled as part of Kellogg’s African-American Men and Boys Initiative found that ten years later, only half of these organizations still existed and only a quarter still had programming focused on black men and boys. The organizations supported by the Ford Foundation fared somewhat better. Mincy has estimated that about half of the intermediaries started in the mid- to late 1990s under the auspices of the Strengthening Fragile Families Initiatives still exist in 2010 and that a number of leaders supported by these organizations have gone on to hold influential posts in the federal government. Nevertheless, for an issue as complex and challenging as the crisis facing this population, the short average organizational life cycle is discouraging. This relatively rapid loss of institutional capacity represents one of the most important shortcomings of the first period of investment.

Although the sudden decline in national foundation funding was dramatic and consequential, some new sources of support emerged during this relative drought. A group of smaller and regional funders began to pioneer new work on black men that hewed much closer to Kellogg’s earlier work than to the dominant fatherhood initiatives. These efforts would lay the foundation for a renaissance of investment on the part of larger national foundations a few years hence. In 2003 the Schott Foundation for Public Education initiated a nationwide investigation of the educational performance of black males. The Mitchell Kapor Foundation commissioned its own overview of the conditions facing black men and explored the ways that grant making could best improve educational outcomes of black males. The Chicago Community Trust—one of the nation’s largest community foundations—began to plan an initiative to improve outcomes among black males in Chicago. Based on this work, all three foundations subsequently created programs of focused giving that targeted black men and boys.

2006–Present: Funding Black Men as Black Men (and Boys)

The final period examined began in 2006 and continues through today, albeit at slightly lower funding levels. This period is marked by renewed (and new) interest among some of the large national foundations, following several years of relative dormancy, and a shift in focus from fatherhood to
initiatives that explicitly target black men and boys in their own right, irrespective of their status as fathers. In March 2006 the *New York Times* ran a front-page story entitled “Plight Deepens for Black Men, Studies Warn” that reviewed the findings of Ron Mincy’s *Black Males Left Behind*, a collection of essays on the impact of the 1990s economic boom on black men. Largely in response to this article, a small group of ABFE members convened to discuss how philanthropy could respond to the crisis surrounding black males. Shortly thereafter, the Ford Foundation and the Open Society Institute began to initiate a new set of targeted investments focused on this population.

Senior program officer Loren Harris drove the brief resurgence of this work at the Ford Foundation. Between 2006 and 2009, Harris collaborated with Frontline Consulting to publish a series of reports on philanthropic giving focused on black men and boys. This work initially centered on developing strategic ways to build and sustain capacity in the field, to avoid the setbacks that occurred in the wake of the fatherhood work. Harris concluded that “the architecture needed to advance efforts with black men and boys would be minimally comprised of a national resource center, a practitioners’ network, a clearinghouse for scholarly work and a permanent fund to support the field of practice in perpetuity.” After convening a national meeting and a series of regional funder meetings to mobilize the philanthropic community, Ford published a report that reviewed philanthropic efforts targeting black men and boys as well as barriers to this work.

In 2006, Harris teamed up with the Twenty-First Century Foundation, a smaller national foundation that facilitates strategic giving for black community change, to host a National Conversation on Black Men and Boys that brought together more than forty national and local leaders. The Ford Foundation and the Twenty-First Century Foundation organized the meeting participants in a collaborative, national effort called the 2025 Campaign for Black Men and Boys. Before departing Ford at the end of his term limit in 2009, Harris also supported the launch of the University of Michigan’s Scholars Network on Marginalized Males, Public Private Venture’s Practitioners Network on Marginalized Males, and the National Black Programming Consortium’s Masculinity Project. Despite these concerted efforts, however, little work in this arena continued at Ford after Harris left the foundation. Since departing Ford, he has continued his central leadership role in the effort to mobilize philanthropic response through his independent consulting practice.

The Open Society Institute, another large national foundation, took up the work around black men and boys beginning in 2008, initially under
the direction of program officer Alvin Starks. In May of that year, the institute launched its four-year fifteen-million-dollar Campaign for Black Male Achievement after a year of program development and exploratory grant making. A cross-cutting, place-based initiative located in six cities, the campaign is “aimed at promoting the positive roles government and philanthropy can play in advancing public policy reforms” as well as “key institutional and cultural changes that can help black males thrive.” Over the past two years the institute has emerged as the key funder in this arena, linking efforts of the Schott Foundation, the Twenty-First Century Foundation, and other regional and smaller national foundations. Although Starks has since left the Open Society Institute, the program has continued, currently led by Shawn Dove and Rashid Shabazz.

This recent leadership by the Ford Foundation and the Open Society Institute, in partnership with Schott and the Twenty-First Century Foundation, has encouraged other large national funders to enter the field. Since 2008, several major foundations have begun a variety of initiatives targeted at black men and boys. The Robert Wood Johnson Foundation and Changemakers began the “Young Men at Risk: Transforming the Power of a Generation” competition for innovative program models that target men of color. In 2009 the Kellogg Foundation convened a national meeting in Washington, D.C., called “Strengthen the Ties: Promoting Success of Boys and Men of Color.” Later that same year Kellogg launched its Young Men of Color initiative.

Today this latest generation of foundation work is in its early stages, the total funding committed is relatively low, and the ultimate impact remains to be seen. Initial investments, however, appear promising: the initiatives described here have begun to build the infrastructure required to address the structural and cultural roots of the crisis by connecting funders, bolstering the capacity of practitioners, creating networks of scholars, and articulating emerging policy platforms. Yet the current levels of giving are arguably not commensurate with the scale and urgency of the problem. It will require a broader and deeper response from the philanthropic community to bring these efforts to the necessary level.

LARGE, NEW PHILANTHROPY REMAINS UNDERREPRESENTED

Since the early 1990s, older foundations have dominated the philanthropic efforts targeting black men and boys, with newer foundations playing a minor role. Indeed, the most prominent of these projects were initiated by large foundations begun before 1980 by such industrialists as Ford, Casey,
Kellogg, and Mott. Among large, new philanthropy, only the Open Society Institute has significantly invested in targeted initiatives.  

A similar pattern emerged when we restricted our analysis to the past seven years, to control for the fact that many new foundations were not founded until the mid- to late 1990s or the early 2000s. Looking at the top fifty largest national foundations, 14 percent \( (n = 5) \) of the thirty-five foundations begun before 1980 have initiatives or subinitiatives targeted at black men and boys; these five foundations have invested a total of approximately $28 million in addressing the crisis over this time period. By contrast, only 7 percent \( (n = 1) \) of the fifteen foundations begun after 1980 have such initiatives; this single foundation invested a total of approximately $4 million (unadjusted) during the same time frame. To make sure that this finding was not an artifact of the exclusive focus on funders with targeted initiatives, we did a supplemental analysis for the fiscal years 2006 to 2008 that included not only those grants awarded by foundations that had an initiative or subinitiative targeting black men and boys, but also any one-off grants by other foundations that targeted this population but were not part of a specific black men and boys initiative. The same patterns emerge: between 2006 and 2008, 0.14 percent of total giving among the old “pre-1980” foundations went toward black men and boys, compared with just 0.06 percent of total giving among the new “post-1980” foundations.

This review of foundation investment patterns raises three crucial questions:

1. What are the general barriers to increasing foundation funding targeted at the crisis?
2. What are the specific barriers to increasing targeted funding among newer foundations?
3. How can philanthropy adjust current practices to overcome these barriers?

To address the first question, we draw on the existing literature and interviews with past and current foundation program officers and leaders. To address the second, we rely on personal observations from nearly two decades of combined experience working with foundation leaders engaged in strategic planning who have emerged as leading practitioners of strategic philanthropy. We served in this capacity as leaders of a nonprofit management consulting firm that helped pilot many of the practices central to contemporary strategic philanthropy. Our insights come from observing the inner workings of these foundations and reflecting on our own practices.
as advisers who serve these organizations. To address the third and final question, we offer a set of concrete recommendations.

**Identifying General Barriers to Increasing Targeted Funding among All Foundations**

Our review of the literature as well as one-on-one interviews with program officers reveal three main reasons for limited giving among foundations: (1) the challenges involved in directly addressing race and gender in America; (2) foundation staff’s reluctance to take on a highly complex social problem with few proven solutions and a significant risk of failure; and (3) the absence of sustained institutional support from foundation leadership. We address each of these barriers in turn.

**Challenges in addressing race in America.** Since the early 1980s, government and public support for efforts to achieve racial justice have declined—especially those that use race as a factor in targeting services or determining eligibility for college admissions. The public’s negative reaction to mandated busing in the 1970s was followed by a growing backlash against affirmative action that included a number of state-sponsored ballot initiatives in the early and mid-1990s outlawing the use of race in college admissions. This culminated in a number of Supreme Court decisions in the 1990s and 2000s that significantly constrained the ability of schools, colleges, and universities to voluntarily use race to achieve integration. It would be hard to overstate the impact of this shift in public attitudes and jurisprudence. Although the constraints on using race applied only to state actors, academics cite a widespread chilling effect when it comes to creating racially targeted programming across all institutions, both public and private.

Feedback from the Ford Foundation’s recent regional gatherings of funders and our own interviews with program officers suggest that this backlash has made its way into philanthropy. The Ford Foundation’s report *Momentum* relays program officers’ candid discussions about “the potential negative fallout that could come with pushing issues of race in philanthropic institutions,” and “how putting race on the table has come increasingly under attack in this country.” In interviews program officers described the need to strip any proposed initiative of language that would “flag it as a race based issue.” They explained that when they go to their board, they need “to talk in a race neutral way in order to garner support.”

Ironically, the retreat from directly addressing race has been reinforced by the election of Barack Obama, the country’s first black president, and
the emerging narrative of a “postracial” society, in which racial discrimination ostensibly no longer occurs and race is increasingly irrelevant. Foundation staff cite “a desire among many individuals within American society (including those involved with philanthropy) to magically morph to a post-racial utopia where the differences of the past are erased.” In this postracial context black leaders increasingly find that their own success is taken as evidence for the irrelevance of race. Consequently, their support for initiatives focused on the black community is perceived as a form of favoritism, “special interest,” or bias. This dynamic makes it uniquely challenging for black leaders to address issues of race.

A number of the largest and oldest foundations today have black executives on their senior leadership team who find themselves in similar situations with their colleagues, boards, and staff. In interviews with foundation staff, respondents described the need for black program officers and leadership to tread very carefully when promoting initiatives around race. They realize that such initiatives may well be met with skepticism, and they must be prepared to meet the highest burden of proof. Similarly, in regional gatherings held by Ford and attended primarily by black foundation staff, participants reported that initiating discussions of race at foundations often creates considerable discomfort and can affect career progression. There are very real political and professional costs shouldered by black leadership when they act as champions for this issue.

The challenges involved in addressing race are further compounded by the intervening role of gender. Foundation work focusing on black males must contend with complex interactions between race and gender that produce a powerful set of societal stereotypes, cultural images, and expectations around black masculinity. The construction of black men as hypermasculine, violent criminals reinforces the general reluctance on the part of foundations to address race and supports the perception of black men as “unsympathetic” and the issues involved insoluble. In addition, the decision to target men and boys can make the work vulnerable to being perceived, inaccurately, as antifeminist. One of the major contributions of the fatherhood work from the 1990s was to erode this perception and position the work as part of a broader agenda involving the well-being of poor families, mothers, and children. Nevertheless, a recent report on philanthropy’s potential to address the conditions of black males involving anonymous interviews with foundation executives suggests that some of this reluctance remains. These challenges related to gender combine with the nation’s retreat from affirmative action, the attendant difficulty of talking directly and frankly about race, and the emerging myth of a
postracial America to constitute major barriers to increased targeted funding, particularly among the largest, most prominent national foundations.

**Inertia arising from complexity.** The sheer complexity of the crisis is a second barrier to increased foundation funding. When confronted with a truly tough problem for which there are few proven solutions and a significant risk of failure, foundation benefactors, staff, and boards become increasingly risk averse. The daunting challenges inherent in the crisis—along with its multicausal nature and the consequent need for solutions that cross organizational and system boundaries, sector silos, and life stages—can make the issue appear overwhelmingly complex. This problem is especially acute for foundations that are limited to only addressing one categorical area, like health or education. In interviews program officers at the health foundations described their frustration at being able to address only one component of the crisis—violence or mental health, for example—when clearly other components, such as education and employment, have played such important roles. They felt that if they could not address all elements simultaneously, their efforts would be destined to fail.

This is further complicated by the relative newness of their endeavors: the field is still emerging, nonprofit capacity is undeveloped, leadership is not connected, and the research infrastructure is nascent. Many foundations are daunted by the challenge. Recent work by Ford, the Open Society Institute, the Twenty-First Century Foundation, and the Schott Foundation for Public Education directly addresses many of these concerns by creating funders’ and scholars’ networks, guides to giving, reviews of existing practitioner efforts, and capacity-building grants for practitioners. Despite these recent investments, however, the perception of intractability remains a major barrier among many funders.

**Lack of sustained support by leadership.** The third and final barrier to increased foundation funding concerns the lack of sustained support among senior foundation leadership for targeted funding. Our interviews with program officers suggest that sustained support from foundation leaders—and in particular, the president or CEO—made a real, marked difference in officers’ ability to successfully advance a set of targeted investments and to create a sustainable program capable of surviving their own departure from the foundation. Interviews with those involved in OSI’s Campaign for Black Male Achievement cite the crucial role of strong public support from the benefactor, George Soros; the president, Gara LaMarche; and board members Lani Guinier and Geoffrey Canada. Similarly, interviewees at Kellogg spoke of the importance of the vision and ongoing support of the
vice president for health, Gail Christopher; the president, Sterling Speirn; and board member Joe Stewart.

In instances where targeted funding did materialize, a special set of circumstances appears to have been in place. There were entrepreneurial program officers willing to take initiative and a window of opportunity created by increased media attention, moral panic, or a high-profile policy issue involving black men. For example, in the early 1990s Bobby Austin’s arrival at the Kellogg Foundation coincided with theories about the new “underclass” and the framing of black young men as either an “endangered species” or as “super-predators.” Similarly, in the mid-1990s Ron Mincy’s presence at the Ford Foundation coincided with welfare reform and the Million Man March. And in the early 2000s the work of Loren Harris at Ford and Alvin Starks at the Open Society Institute took place in the context of Hurricane Katrina and the 2006 publication of Mincy’s Black Males Left Behind, with its attendant coverage by the New York Times.

The net result of this dynamic is erratic patterns of funding that are highly dependent on having the right entrepreneurial program officer in the right place at the right time. This response is far too idiosyncratic for a crisis that is simultaneously acute and chronic. It also has had a particularly devastating impact on sector capacity and, more important, on black males and their communities. Right now we are in one of the upswings. How do we avoid this mistake this time around? The seven recommendations at the end of this chapter offer suggestions about how to begin.

Identifying Specific Barriers to Increasing Targeted Funding among New Philanthropy

Difficulties discussing race, the reluctance to take on a complex problem, and insufficient support from senior leadership contribute to limited levels of giving across all foundations. However, these realities cannot explain the particularly low levels of giving among new foundations. All foundations, whether in the world of old or new philanthropy, must grapple with the difficulties of discussing and directly addressing race in this country. All face the challenges associated with addressing a complex, social problem with limited proven solutions. Why then has one group responded to this crisis to a much greater extent than the other? One common explanation is that living donors who run new foundations are more likely to be ideologically conservative than liberal professionals who run older foundations, whose benefactors are long deceased. According to this explanation, older
foundations have drifted away from the more conservative “pull yourself up by your bootstraps” orientation of their founders. As such, they have morphed into institutes of social engineering run by liberal academics.38

But our experience with new foundations contradicts this explanation and suggests that the conservative-versus-liberal orientation of foundation leadership is not the main driver of lower levels of giving. Values with respect to race, individual responsibility, and the “deserving versus undeserving” poor almost certainly influence patterns of giving around this issue. However, we have not observed a marked difference on these dimensions between living benefactors and the staff and boards of older foundations. If anything, old philanthropy’s reliance on boards versus living benefactors makes those institutions more risk averse and amenable to the vagaries of public opinion. The values that are more prominent among newer philanthropists—such as a free-market orientation, seeing the public sector as inefficient, and supporting innovation—do not preclude action on this issue. In fact, efforts to build economic self-reliance, support entrepreneurship, and shed the bonds of government dependence have all played a prominent role historically in racial-justice work.39

Indeed, our experience with actual planning processes reveals new philanthropists’ willingness, in theory, to take on such issues as the crisis among black men and boys. We typically begin a planning engagement by exploring whether any group or cause is clearly off the table because of the foundation’s values or preferences. Not one institution with which we have worked has said that it would consider excluding small, high-needs populations—including African American men and boys. In fact, almost all have expressed an unusual level of interest in addressing the “toughest cases.” The question is clear: Why, despite the apparent willingness of foundation leadership to engage such a problem, do proposed initiatives to address black boys and young men wind up on the cutting-room floor at the end of the day? We hypothesize that new philanthropy’s low levels of investment are in part the unintended consequence of methods of strategic planning designed to maximize impact and “value for money.”

Although the living benefactors of new philanthropy are no more likely to be ideologically averse to investment to end the crisis, they are more likely to shape their philanthropy around the same goals and approach that fueled their success in the private sector: a relentless quest to maximize return, coupled with methods of rigorous, data-driven strategic planning and resource allocation. A 2006 study of leadership at large, private foundations has confirmed that newer foundations are more likely to apply strategic planning methods to their work than older foundations.40 These
strategic planning methods are characterized by: (1) a focus on maximizing impact given constrained resources; (2) an emphasis on measurable outcomes; (3) the use of data and empirical evidence to inform decisions; and (4) a preference for strategies that involve scaling discrete, proven, replicable programs or approaches.

This approach to philanthropic planning is a significant improvement over past practices that may have selected “pet projects” for funding, based on benefactors’ or program officers’ personal preferences. Indeed, as management consultants who have sought to bridge the for-profit and nonprofit sectors, we have played a central role in importing these planning methods from the for-profit sector and tailoring them to the needs of foundations. Yet we have also come to recognize that these systematic, strategic approaches to philanthropy can lead adopters to minimize or avoid investment in small, high-needs populations—including black men and boys.

Although new philanthropists piloted the planning and resource allocation methods central to the strategic approach, these techniques are rapidly becoming the default methods of the largest national foundations. The same study that demonstrated newer foundations are more likely to apply strategic planning methods to their work characterized the bulk of older foundations as “partial strategists” who apply these methods to some of their decision making but not all. Many of the recent thought-leaders who espouse strategic philanthropy are not products of the new economy; rather, they hail from the academy, like Paul Brest of the Hewlett Foundation. The leading edge in philanthropic practice has clearly made its way into the mainstream. As such, the time has come to reflect on and improve the emerging standard practice for foundation planning. In the spirit of continuous improvement of our own work, we offer a provocative, informed hypothesis and a set of recommendations to foundations and the consultancies that assist them in strategic planning.

THE IMPACT OF STRATEGIC PLANNING METHODS

In this section we illustrate the ways in which a typical data-driven strategic planning exercise can lead philanthropists away from investment in small, high-needs groups like black men and boys. Although actual planning engagements are much less linear and much more iterative than the simplified version presented here, we think it accurately reflects the main tenets of thorough, thoughtful data-driven planning, as currently practiced. Strategic philanthropists seek to make as big a difference in the world as possible given their limited dollars. The data-driven strategic planning
process helps them to achieve this through a structured exploration of where to focus their giving based on three factors: (1) data on external opportunities and challenges, which includes what other “competitors” are doing and data describing the shifting needs and conditions in the world; (2) the organization’s strengths and limitations, including human and financial resources available; and (3) the foundation’s core values and beliefs. The planning exercise ultimately results in a focused set of goals, a plan detailing activities designed to achieve these goals, recommendations for how to align the organization to execute the plan, and a set of measurements to monitor progress. A central assumption undergirding these methods is that a more focused strategy will increase the foundation’s chance of success through reducing the level of complexity involved in implementation and ensuring that goals are truly commensurate with the human and financial resources available.

A typical planning process is usually comprised of five discrete analytic components or steps. The first three steps allow the foundation to consider the types of change it could try to bring about (the “what”); the target populations it could seek to benefit (the “who”); and the ways in which that change might be realized (the “how”). In the fourth and fifth steps the foundation compares the relative merits of the various identified options by considering their “costs per outcome” and the unique assets the organization could bring to each. On the basis of these five steps the foundation makes a decision about the path it will pursue. Taken together, its final choices about the specific “what,” “who,” and “how” represent the foundation’s theory of change and serve as a guide to focus its subsequent giving. We describe the five planning steps in detail below and explain how in practice each step can unintentionally reduce the chances that a foundation will decide to invest in reversing the crisis among black men and boys.

**Step 1: Identifying the Change the Foundation Wants to Bring About**

The first task of a foundation’s leadership team is to move from the organization’s broad mission statement to a narrower, more concrete and actionable definition of the change they would like to make. At this point in the planning process, the aperture is wide open, multiple sources of data and beliefs are considered, and one of the few constraints raised—that the type of change chosen be observable and measurable—works in favor of investing in the crisis among black young men and boys. Indeed, this crisis has been defined by an endless litany of quantitative measures: dismal gradu-
ation rates, skyrocketing rates of imprisonment, increasing mortality and morbidity rates, and decreasing life chances.

The leadership team is typically interested in focusing on the crisis, citing the urgency of the issue, the pure level of need, and the felt moral imperative to act to change these devastating odds. Reflecting this initial interest, the type of change they ultimately select—whether an increase in levels of employment or improvement in health status—usually encompasses some, if not all, elements of the crisis. This early stage of the planning process typically represents the high water mark in terms of interest and support for adopting a focus on black men and boys. As a foundation proceeds through the next four steps, data-driven methods of strategic planning unintentionally lead to a gradual dampening of their initial enthusiasm.

### Step 2: Identifying the Specific Target Population for Which the Foundation Wants to Make Change

In this crucial second step, consultants encourage the foundation’s leadership team to focus their strategy by defining in greater specificity the different potential “target populations” for which they hope to make change. At this juncture the leadership team is tasked with balancing two competing demands. First, they must identify a target population that is sufficiently large, because they seek to make a big impact, which is generally measured by the number of lives changed. Second, they must also identify a target population without too much variation in terms of level of need, since they need to construct a single, coherent strategy that effectively addresses the entire group. Although the leadership team realizes they could create a number of tailored substrategies to address this diversity of need, they also recognize that this may increase the complexity of implementation and spread the human and financial resources of the foundation too thin.

To help the leadership team narrow the target population and meet these two competing demands, consultants complete a market sizing and segmentation analysis, which uses a variety of quantitative sources to break the larger heterogeneous population into smaller, more homogeneous subgroups with different need profiles. For example, a foundation concerned with poverty alleviation may initially look at all individuals in Illinois who are unemployed: they would find that in 2009, 10.1 percent of the approximately 9.3 million adults in Illinois were unemployed. Analysts would then examine population subgroups, revealing that of the nearly one million unemployed adults in Illinois, 226,000 are black and just 124,000 are black men over age eighteen. Given its mandate to maximize impact,
with these relatively small numbers, the foundation would likely be driven
away from a targeted focus on unemployed black men to focus instead on
the one million unemployed adults in Illinois, of which unemployed black
men remains a subsegment but not the primary focus.

The option to select a broader general population is relatively attractive:
it gives the leadership team the large population size needed to produce big
impact, it avoids the political hazards involved in directly addressing race
within the foundation, and black men and boys still remain part of the
target population. Unfortunately, this decision can seriously undermine the
ability to successfully address the needs of black men and boys, when these
needs are sufficiently different from the majority of the target population.
It can also lead to the explicit removal of a sizable proportion of black men
and boys, when the leadership team attempts to truncate variation in need
within their target population. In this unemployment scenario the leader-
ship team would likely decide to exclude adults with the highest level of
need, such as unemployed workers who are unstably housed or homeless,
a disproportionate number of whom are black men. In either case the crisis
among this population goes unaddressed.

In addition to limiting the sheer scale of impact, this population’s small
size restricts what consultants can infer about them from available data.
This places black men and boys at a significant disadvantage in a planning
process that prizes empirical evidence when making investment decisions.
Consultants use this data in several ways: (1) to describe and compare
populations’ baseline conditions and characteristics, (2) to assess potential
drivers of poor (and favorable) outcomes, and (3) to measure populations’
progress over time. Consultants typically perform their own analyses using
data from large population-based surveys, such as the Current Population
Survey (CPS) or the American Community Survey (ACS). Both surveys
are repeated at least annually, representative of the U.S. population, and
widely available for customized analysis through the Internet. These sur-
veys enable foundations to compare the size, characteristics, and level of
need across different groups of potential beneficiaries and to examine the
types of experiences over time that correlate with particular outcomes. For
black men, however, these survey data and methods of analysis often prove
inadequate because of insufficient subsample size, population undercount,
and selective attrition from longitudinal surveys.

**Insufficient sample size.** The large population-based surveys preferred
by consultants are of limited use when investigating a relatively small but
high-needs group. Because these surveys include only a representative sam-
ples of the population, the consultant must extrapolate from the observa-
tions to estimate the “true” findings for the larger population nationwide. However, if the size of the target subpopulation is small in actuality, the corresponding subsample in the survey data will be too small to produce statistically meaningful results. For example, if consultants attempt to use the CPS to estimate the percentage of twenty-five- to twenty-seven-year-old black men who have a bachelor’s degree, they would find that the “true” estimate lies anywhere between 9 percent and 17 percent. This is a wide margin of error, which makes it extremely difficult to set a baseline or detect any significant changes over time. More accurate statistics on black young men can be obtained from targeted longitudinal surveys that focus specifically on young adults and hence have larger sample sizes. However, these studies happen irregularly and generally only follow one or two birth cohorts. Consequently, they do not provide a standard periodic measurement that can be used to detect current trends and assess change over time.

Disproportionate population undercounting. Most representative national surveys also exclude or undercount two groups in which black men and boys are overrepresented: the unstably housed and the institutionalized. As a result, researchers estimate that only 66 percent of black males ages twenty to twenty-nine are able to be surveyed by the CPS, compared with 85 percent of their nonblack peers. This disproportionate population undercounting likely paints a more optimistic picture of the outcomes of black men and boys than is accurate, as “those who are missed by the survey likely have lower educational attainments.” Indeed, the gap between the high school graduation rates of black men and white men decreases by nearly five percentage points when the prison population is excluded, as is true in the Current Population Survey.

Selective attrition. Because black young men and boys drop out of school at high rates and young ages, they are disproportionately absent from the survey data (notably the longitudinal education surveys, such as NELS, the National Education Longitudinal Study of 1988), because they were either excluded from initial recruitment or lost during follow-up data collection. For instance, the latest national longitudinal school-based study began sampling students in the tenth grade, by which time many young black men had already left high school. Even when surveys begin earlier, the difficulty in tracking and following up with out-of-school youth results in dismal attrition rates, particularly for black men.

The net effect of these three “sampling” factors—insufficient sample size, disproportionate undercounting, and selective attrition—is that black boys and young men, especially those in their teens and early twenties, either appear to be doing better than they actually are or effectively “dis-
appear” from the data that consultants most commonly use to identify and characterize potential target populations in the course of foundation strategic planning.

**Step 3: Determining How the Foundation Will Realize the Change It Seeks for Potential Target Populations**

Although the disadvantages related to small numbers are clearly significant, size alone does not doom a potential target population. The drawbacks stemming from a relatively small “who” can be tempered if a particularly compelling “how” exists—in other words, an exceptionally attractive and effective solution to the problems faced by a specific group. This is addressed in the third step in the planning process, as the foundation’s leadership team and their consultants begin to tackle the “how” of the emerging theory of change. In this step the consultants scan the field for the most compelling and effective solutions focused on the different potential target populations. Optimally, the consultants also assess the rigor of the evidence that these solutions are in fact effective.49

The gold standard for evidence of effectiveness is the randomized controlled trial (RCT) in which participants are randomized to either the treatment group (which receives access to the solution being studied) or the control group (which does not).50 Programmatic interventions that involve the direct delivery of a discrete service are the type of solutions most amenable to RCT evaluation. Consequently, they have the strongest evidence base and are the most valued in the planning process. The consultants summarize their findings for each potential target population in a “benchmarking analysis,” which lays out existing interventions, their estimated impact, and evidence of proven effectiveness. Here the interventions targeting black men and boys fail to hit the appropriate note: most discrete interventions for this population that have been evaluated with RCTs have shown limited evidence of impact. The few interventions that do show impact are relatively intensive, complex, and expensive—characteristics that make them challenging to replicate and scale.

These disappointing evaluation outcomes are driven by the overriding fact that the crisis among black men and boys will not be solved through a single “program solution.” Attempts to reverse the impact of the current crisis that focus primarily on service delivery models and hew to sector or disciplinary boundaries will likely fail. Yet foundation leadership and strategy consultants are drawn to exactly these types of standardized programmatic solutions with proven, quantifiable “impacts” because they fit neatly
into the linear logic of a planning process that was originally designed to help businesses maximize profit. Such solutions most closely resemble a “product” that can be branded, replicated, and brought to scale. However, any truly viable solution to the crisis among African American boys and young men will need to be less of a discrete “product” or “program” and more of a comprehensive set of diverse interventions combined with systems-building and shifts in community norms, policy, and public will. Unfortunately, this is exactly the type of “intervention” that it is most difficult to evaluate through an RCT or even a quasi-experimental study and thus will almost certainly fail to make the consultants’ list of “proven programs” that are presented to foundation leadership.

**Step 4: Comparing the Cost Per Outcome of the Different Options**

During this step foundation leadership compares the options that have emerged, by assessing the relative merits of different combinations of target populations (for example, black men who are incarcerated in the state of California) and potential solutions (for example, targeted recidivism reduction interventions). To weigh these options, foundations require a metric that allows comparisons across groups and interventions. Here the benchmarking analysis from Step 3 neatly combines with the population-sizing from Step 2 to produce such a metric: an estimated per-person cost per outcome (for example, the cost per additional prison sentence averted). In an attempt to maximize their impact, foundations will be drawn to the target population and solutions that maximize outcomes while minimizing the cost per outcome, so as to allow them to buy the greatest number of “significant” outcomes for any fixed amount of giving.

Once again, the standard practice of data-driven strategic planning disadvantages black young men and boys. When a set of expensive and unproven solutions is crossed with a small population, the results are predictable: a high per-person cost estimate. Even though most foundations do not invest directly in service costs beyond a handful of demonstration projects, they view a high per-person cost estimate as a significant liability because of its negative implications for achieving scale. Investment in demonstration projects is almost always predicated on the belief that the government will pay for a program to be scaled if the foundation can show that it works. As the price of the intervention climbs, foundations typically (and correctly) reason that the chances of government assuming the costs of replication diminish.
Step 5: Assessing the Unique Assets of the Foundation and Making a Decision

With 80 percent of the planning process complete, the case for investing in potential solutions to the crisis looks rather weak, with readily apparent risks and highly uncertain returns. As a result, the leadership team’s initial enthusiasm for addressing the crisis among black men and boys will have decidedly waned. The analyses presented so far describe a small population, for which little is known about what works; the programs that do exist are expensive, complex, and have only shown modest impacts. Some may say that this is all good evidence to support philanthropists’ decisions not to place any bets here. To a certain extent, we accept that logic. This is a risky investment and not every foundation has the appetite for this type of risk. However, for the subset of foundations that fully embraces philanthropy’s role as the provider of society’s risk capital, investing in reversing the crisis should still look like an opportunity too good to pass up. The fifth and final step of the planning process, which addresses the foundation’s competencies and role, illustrates this.

Staff and consultants consider the role of the foundation, looking to the specific competencies of the particular organization and to the general competencies of foundations as a class of institutions. Typically, the bulk of this planning time is spent identifying specific organizational competencies that differentiate this foundation from others. For instance, a certain foundation may be unusually good at identifying and vetting potential grantees or have staff with deep knowledge of a certain subsector or who possess an excellent network of field offices. Non-grant-making competencies of the foundation are also assessed, including the power to convene key stakeholders, the ability to use the bully pulpit, and the visibility and skills of the benefactor or current foundation executive. These competencies vary from foundation to foundation and hence in the aggregate neither advantage nor disadvantage the case for investment in black men and boys.

Typically, less time is spent thinking about the general competencies and role of the foundation as an institution—that is, what differentiates foundations from other public- and private-sector sources of funding for social good. These underappreciated competencies are unfortunately the very ones that strongly support a focus on black young men and boys, as they place foundations in a unique position to address issues that the government and private sector have failed to support. These general institutional competencies come into view when philanthropic spending is compared to the likely fate of foundation dollars had the foundation
not been endowed—specifically how government would have used the additional increment of tax revenue and how the benefactor would have invested or consumed in the private market with his or her post-tax wealth. Consequently, to maximize their unique contribution, foundations should focus on investing in those issues that the public and private sectors cannot or will not address either because of a market failure or because the problem centers on an unpopular, marginalized, and disenfranchised minority group often considered politically “untouchable.” The latter, in particular, aptly describes the crisis among black young men and boys.

After these five steps have been completed, the planning process ends and the foundation leadership makes a recommendation to their board and benefactors. The foundation leadership’s decision to focus on a specific challenge, target population, and potential solution set is made against the backdrop of a new level of transparency and accountability at the core of the data-driven strategic planning approach. The combination of measurable outcomes and relatively short time frames for assessing foundation strategies (typically five to seven years) means that failure or success will likely be made visible relatively quickly. In the face of this visibility, foundation leadership can become increasingly risk averse.

An accountability system that prizes a marked uptick in the number of “significant” outcomes and promises visibility can have the unintended consequence of encouraging foundation staff to focus on social problems and target populations most amenable to quick, short- to medium-term solutions that are relatively “known.” Engaging in this type of “cream skimming” may encourage foundations to focus on those issues and/or participants most likely to improve without the help of the investment or intervention; as a consequence, it nets limited social good while maintaining the false appearance of overall success. Strategic philanthropists’ emphasis on accountability for measurable change in a relatively short period of time ultimately makes it even less likely that foundation leadership will choose to devote resources to extremely disadvantaged populations and entrenched, challenging problems.

**CLOSING THE GAP: RECOMMENDATIONS FOR ACCELERATING CHANGE**

We offer seven concrete recommendations for overcoming the general and specific barriers outlined in this chapter. If these barriers are not addressed, we will likely not see increased, targeted funding from big philanthropy. Instead, the field will continue to rely on the entrepreneurial efforts of
program officers at large foundations and the ongoing work of regional, community, and smaller national foundations. In the meantime those large foundations without an entrepreneurial program officer will increasingly adopt the standard practices of data-driven strategic planning and as a result be led away from working with this population. Despite these considerable barriers, however, significant progress has been made since the early 1990s. We believe there is an opportunity to markedly increase progress through implementing these recommendations. The first two recommendations address the general barriers to increased funding. Recommendations 3 through 7 address barriers related to the strategic planning process.

**Recommendation #1**

A group of presidents of large, national foundations publicly commit to a coordinated long-term response to the crisis. Since the early 1990s, the onus for organizing a philanthropic response has disproportionately rested with individual program officers willing to go to extraordinary lengths to overcome barriers related to race, complexity, and the absence of institutional leadership. Foundation leadership at the highest level must rise to the challenge and make a commitment internally to their staff and board and externally to the public to address this crisis. Although it may be difficult to affect a huge shift in the way race is discussed in the United States, foundation leaders can make it easier to address race within the confines of their institutions. If a few key leaders—both foundation presidents and board members—were to make their commitment clear to their staff, it would become substantially easier for foundation staff, benefactors, and boards to begin a productive and powerful discussion about how to address the crisis.

In addition to making their commitment known inside their own organizations, foundation leaders should make full use of their bully pulpit. They should reframe the issue as one of building a functioning, thriving democracy that will not stand for the extreme marginalization and subjugation of any one race or gender group. It is essential that this group of foundation presidents and board members be multiracial. For the past two decades much of the work of addressing the crisis has been taken up by a small group of black men and women working in foundations or sitting on boards. White, Latino, Asian, and Native American leadership must step forward and join these efforts. A multiracial group of leaders can help to counter the difficulties of addressing race in “postracial” America while
sending a powerful message that this is a shared problem that demands a shared response. If we are truly to embrace this as a crisis of democracy with far reaching impact, then we all must take responsibility to reverse it.

Finally, we strongly recommend that these efforts are led by a group of foundation leaders rather than a single “lead funder” who steps up to publicly own the issue. This would address what Marcus J. Littles, Ryan Bowers, and Micah Gilmer have described as the problem of the maverick foundation that enters and dominates an issue and a field only to vacate it completely seven years later. A collaborative response that builds thoughtfully on current work would be more sustainable and minimize the threat of erratic foundation investment undermining the field’s capacity.

**Recommendation #2**

*Institutionalize a long-term, collaborative approach through endowing a funding collaborative devoted to addressing the crisis among black young men and boys over the next two decades.* A funding collaborative in which national, regional, and local foundations pool resources to mount a long-term response to the crisis can effectively address many of the most glaring barriers to increased, effective philanthropic investment. It can counter the cyclical, feast-or-famine nature of societal and philanthropic response to the crisis by being structured via an endowment to have at least a twenty-year life span. This “patient capital” can then be thoughtfully invested in ways that sustainably build the field—including strengthening the capacity of intermediaries and practitioners, incubating emerging innovators, creating a robust research infrastructure, and strengthening the connections between practitioners, researchers, and policymakers.

This approach will ensure that institutional memory about the work is not lost and that lessons from past efforts need not be relearned every decade. A funding collaborative can also address specific barriers faced by new philanthropists and other practitioners of strategic philanthropy. Specifically, the collaborative can provide concrete examples of strategic grant-making approaches and can offer an avenue for investment, short of starting an initiative, that does not require foundation staff to identify a small number of focused “big bets” and promise measureable impact over the course of a handful of years. Finally, a collaborative can address challenges faced by foundations that work in sector-specific silos (for example, education, health, and civic involvement) by enabling, for instance, a health foundation to team with foundations that address employment and education and together mount a comprehensive response.
Formative work on making this recommendation a reality has already begun. Jacqueline Copeland-Carson has completed an excellent feasibility study of this type of funding collaborative for the Ford Foundation, entitled “The My Brother’s Keeper Fund: Collaborative Strategy to Address America’s Black Male Crisis.” Grantmakers for Children, Families, and Youth has launched a Healthy Men, Healthy Communities Initiative within their network, designed to “serve as a learning and mobilization venue for funders who, regardless of their specific areas of grant making, seek to understand how direct service, research, policy analysis, community advocacy, movement building, and other field-building tools can impact efforts to achieve long-term social change for marginalized males and their communities.”

We urge foundation leaders to take the next essential step and make the required financial commitments.

**Recommendation #3**

*Begin the planning process with an in-depth consideration of the foundation’s role and foreground this throughout the planning process.* We recommend that foundation leadership explore the foundation’s role earlier in the strategic planning process and return iteratively to it throughout the process. Using role consideration as an early screen can offset the limitations that reliance on data and evaluations necessarily introduce. In particular, we recommend giving considerable time upfront to discussing with foundation leadership what makes philanthropic dollars special, different, and potentially more advantageous than dollars from the public or private sector. The leadership team should focus on identifying instances where the demands of democratic governance or the workings of the free market make these institutions incapable of effectively addressing and solving social problems. In such instances the application of flexible foundation dollars has the potential to do the most good. We recommend that foundation leadership consider prioritizing the following three categories of economic or political market failures:

1. Issues on which a democratic government will not act because of the overwhelming influence of powerful interest groups or because the population/constituency in need is disenfranchised, marginalized, or otherwise locked out of the system.

2. Times when the free market is not working—and government has not stepped in to fill the gap.
3. Issues for which we have no idea how to crack the problem, and neither government nor the market is providing the right incentives or signals to spark needed innovation.

The field has already made hopeful strides toward addressing the second and third categories as foundation leaders have increasingly recognized and embraced their comparative advantage when it comes to addressing economic market failures and encouraging innovation. Foundation leadership has been slower to embrace the first category—issues where the normal functioning of the democratic process falls short by dint of certain populations being disenfranchised, marginalized, and politically unpopular and/or powerful interest groups having “captured” policymakers and regulators.53

**Recommendation #4**

Begin using a “gap check” metric as a way to assess the impact of potential strategies on equity. Every foundation, according to the values of benefactors, boards, and staff, will seek a different balance between equity and efficiency in its giving. But to balance the two, both must be made visible as measures for which the foundation holds itself accountable. This can be achieved by including a “gap check” in which analysts look at whether a potential strategy would exacerbate, lessen, or have no effect on existing disparities by race, gender, or socioeconomic status. Such a measure provides a quick check on the impact of a proposed strategy on race, gender, and class disparities.

For instance, consider a foundation that has chosen to focus on early childhood education, with the goal of getting two out of three students proficient in reading by the fourth grade as measured by the National Assessment of Educational Progress. Currently, only 36 percent of fourth-graders meet this standard. This goal will focus grantees, schools, and teachers on improving the performance of so-called “bubble kids,” those students who are closest to achieving the passing score and need help to “get over the line.” Black boys, however, are underrepresented among students on the bubble and overrepresented among those students furthest from “the line.” As a result, the foundation could reach its goal of 66 percent of students becoming reading proficient, while leaving the majority of these boys behind. In this example the adopted strategy would risk exacerbating racial and gender disparities. Once the possibility has been identified, the foundation can take steps to mitigate it.
**Recommendation #5**

*Expand the types of analytics and metrics used to calculate impact.* We recommend that foundations expand and alter the methods used to compare the relative cost-effectiveness of different strategies targeting specific solutions and populations. In particular, foundations need to move beyond simply counting outcomes as the marker of impact (x number of lives saved, x number of graduates, and so on) and then calculating and comparing the cost per additional outcome. These metrics are limited, as they (1) look only at the cost side of the equation (and then only at costs incurred); and (2) assume that the incremental social benefit that comes from every single positive outcome—such as high school graduation—is essentially the same. We recommend that in addition to these important metrics, foundation leadership look at:

- The negative effects that flow from some subset of the population (the most difficult to reach) not achieving a particular outcome; these effects typically affect people well beyond the target population. For instance, low levels of education are strongly associated with crime, violence, and welfare dependency. When we increase education levels among the worst off, we can avoid many of these significant costs.

- The positive effects that flow from achieving a particular outcome; these effects also typically reach people outside of the target population.

For instance, the benefits of increased education accrue not only to the individual who receives the degree but also to society in the form of increases in tax revenue to all levels of government from a rise in lifetime earnings. If a foundation wanted to increase levels of education and they were struggling to decide whether to target their efforts on (1) young people who have dropped out of high school, (2) those who have completed high school but are unprepared for college work, or (3) those who have enrolled in college but have failed to complete their degree, they would compare the cost and potential impact of working with each group. The most common approach attempts to estimate the cost per additional graduate borne by the foundation and the nation.

These cost estimates allow the leadership team to make the following type of forecasts: “Nationally, we’d have to expend this amount of public resources to get a certain number of incremental graduates”; or “As a
foundation, we’d expend this much of our endowment to get a certain number of incremental graduates.” In either case, subject to budget constraints, this allows the leadership to maximize the number of additional graduates. But it does not necessarily help them to maximize social good. The calculus could change considerably if the two types of impacts we recommend are also examined. As Henry Levin and his colleagues have demonstrated, increasing levels of education for a high-school dropout brings in a bigger increase in tax revenue and a significantly larger reduction in harm and public expense resulting from reduced welfare, Medicaid, and juvenile justice costs than increasing levels of education for a high-school graduate (figures 17.1 and 17.2).

Hence, even though it is cheaper to help the high-school graduate, the net result is a smaller increment of social good.

We want to be clear, however: We are not recommending that foundations leap into the highly technical world of cost-benefit analysis. Rather, we are suggesting that measures of social good and social harm could usefully supplement current costing outcomes, giving foundations a fuller picture of potential impact while not disadvantaging the hardest to serve. These measures simply add more information to the growing lists of considerations that foundations must weigh qualitatively when choosing to

Figure 17.1. Social benefits associated with getting a dropout two years of college education. Note: Societal benefits discounted back to present day at a 3.5 percent rate. Source: Levin et al., “Costs and Benefits of an Excellent Education for America’s Children.”
focus on any single population. No single quantitative metric can ultimately give benefactors and foundation leadership the answer to how they should give their money.

**Recommendation #6**

*Alter evidence-driven methods used to identify potential solutions to be inclusive of systems change and innovation—versus just “proven” programs.* Although we applaud foundations’ increasing attention to social science research on program effectiveness, we also recognize the limits inherent in relying too much on “proven” programs. Social problems that are resistant to either “silver bullet” programmatic solutions or straight-
forward policy fixes most amenable to rigorous evaluation get quickly labeled “intractable” or “unsolvable.” These labels scare boards and foundation leadership away from investing in these issues and seriously dampen public and political will to take them on in the public sector. Strategic philanthropy can contribute to reversing this unhelpful dynamic in two ways: (1) by broadening the definition of a “solution” to include complex systems change work, and (2) by embracing “intractable” and “unsolvable” issues through innovation.

Significant movement has been made on the first front since the early 2000s, including a shift among strategic philanthropists from a narrow focus on “programs” and discrete “interventions” to broader systems change work. For instance, the Gates Foundation’s work to reform high schools in the United States has morphed multiple times over the past decade, each time moving farther away from “program” solutions and incrementally closer to system solutions. In the late 1990s, in response to data showing that the education system was failing low-income and minority students, foundation leaders chose to take on the weakest link in the K–12 system: high schools. They began the search for solutions by gravitating to a classic productlike “discrete intervention”: small schools. They adopted a typical replicate-and-scale strategy focused on outside-the-system providers (those who created small schools).

Within a handful of years, however, it became increasingly clear that to achieve scale, the foundation would have to go inside the public school system. They moved toward partnering with large districts to break apart failing high schools into smaller learning communities. Eight years in, and facing flat-line national test scores among seventeen-year-olds, the foundation, under a new program director, reevaluated its strategy yet again based on lessons learned and the latest research in the field. This time, leadership recognized the limits of focusing largely on school structure and assuming that the needed shifts in teaching and learning would naturally follow. The team pivoted to focus directly on transforming the teaching profession and improving the quality of teaching and learning in every classroom through a systems change strategy that is not about program replication but rather about broad-scale implementation across multiple systems. Rigorous evaluation should continue to play a central, if evolving, role in strategic philanthropy, as foundations broaden their definition of solutions to include systems change approaches. Over the past thirty years academics and such think tanks as MDRC, The Urban Institute, and Mathematica have become increasingly sophisticated at evaluating
the impact of systems change solutions and policy changes at the city and state level. As strategic philanthropy continues to explore systems change solutions, these methods should be consistently applied and further methodological innovation supported.

Recommendation #7

*Adopt a portfolio approach that allows for diversification of risk and broaden the time frame over which investments are evaluated.* This approach borrows language from private-equity investors and assumes that a foundation will intentionally take on a mix of issues with varied levels of risk and return. This allows foundation leadership, staff, and boards to manage risk in ways other than favoring the path of least resistance—that is, very risky bets can be balanced with safer investments. Some foundations may even want to carve out a specific percentage of giving for areas of high-risk, high-return giving. This recommendation is designed to counterbalance investment disincentives produced by the emphasis on measurable outcomes of success. It sends a clear message that the foundation is willing to take a chance at “succeeding brilliantly” by being willing to “fail wisely.”

We also recommend that foundations extend the duration of their commitments considerably to a specific issue. As long as foundation initiatives are evaluated at five- to seven-year intervals, few program directors and foundation presidents will take on entrenched social problems that require long-term systems change work, field and organizational capacity building, and leadership development. In most cases it is unreasonable to expect measurable progress on such problems in a five- to seven-year period. Boards and benefactors should consider shifting these incentives by making a multidecade commitment to an issue area.

**CONCLUSION**

At the outset of the twenty-first century the crisis among black men and boys is arguably one of the most important moral challenges this country faces. It is undoubtedly the next essential step in the ongoing struggle to dismantle a racial caste system in America. To ignore or marginalize the crisis is to put our democratic system at serious risk. We urge the new generation of foundation leadership to embrace this challenge and make the best use of philanthropic dollars, voice, and influence to bring about deep, sustainable, and just change.
NOTES

1. These statistics come from Western, *Punishment and Inequality in America*.
2. Lawrence and Mukai, *Foundation Growth and Giving Estimates*.
3. Government plays perhaps the most crucial role, as it has nearly exclusive control over the two large systems most implicated in the crisis: the educational system and the criminal justice system. The government is also uniquely positioned to address larger structural forces that drive the crisis—specifically, chronic unemployment driven by deindustrialization, employment discrimination, and poverty—through such policy levers as hiring incentives, antidiscrimination laws, income support, and tax policy. The for-profit sector also plays a central role, as it oversees the other large system affecting the well-being of black men: the labor market.
4. The nonprofit sector plays an essential role, addressing the ways that individual choices, community norms, and culture contribute to the crisis through organizing and giving voice to black men and boys and their families while also innovating and delivering culturally competent services.
5. Ford Foundation, *Civil Rights, Social Justice, and Black America*.
6. This figure is calculated using U.S. Census 2000 data, cited in Twenty-First Century Foundation, *Community Returns*.
9. Ekholm, “Plight Deepens for Black Men, Studies Warn,” front page; “jobless” is defined as being unable to find work, not seeking it, or being incarcerated.
10. Pew Center on the States, *One in One Hundred*.
11. Western, *Punishment and Inequality in America*.
15. Levin et al., “Costs and Benefits of an Excellent Education for All of America’s Children.”
17. The data collected are based on the giving records of the fifty largest national grant-making foundations in the United States, ranked by the market value of their assets, based on the most current audited financial data in the Foundation Center’s database as of February 11, 2010.
18. Prominent examples of economic shifts and more universal programs that have failed to reach black males include the economic boom of the late 1990s and the results from the evaluation of the Moving to Opportunity program, which gave rental vouchers designed to help poor minority families move from distressed, high-poverty neighborhoods to better locations. See Mincy, *Black Males Left Behind*, and Turner and Rawlings, *Overcoming Concentrated Poverty and Isolation*. 
19. Dollar amounts presented here are reported in real 2009 dollars. The unadjusted figures are listed in parentheses. The original grant amounts were adjusted using the relative share of GDP using the “Measuring Wealth” conversion instrument available online at http://www.measuringwealth.com. The dollar amounts presented include grants made by the national foundations that had initiatives explicitly and uniquely targeted at black men and/or boys and who either publicly reported individual grant-level data from 1990 through 2010 on their Web sites or who responded to our request for this grant-level data. Six foundations met these criteria: Annie E. Casey, Ford, W. K. Kellogg, Lumina, Charles Stewart Mott, the Open Society Institute, and Robert Wood Johnson. At the time of submitting this chapter, the Annie E. Casey Foundation had not responded to our requests for such data and is therefore not included in this analysis.

20. There was significant work done in the two decades before the early 1990s, the start of our study. In the late 1970s and 1980s, policy, foundation, and academic work focused on fatherhood, family formation, and employment in the lives of black men. Two notable multicity demonstration projects jointly funded by the federal government and foundations were Parents’ Fair Share and the Young Unwed Fathers Project. For a fuller description of this early work, see Sylvester and Reich, Making Fathers Count, 4–17.

21. Wilson, Truly Disadvantaged.

22. Telephone interview by Tia Elena Martinez with Loren Harris, March 11, 2010, San Francisco.

23. Ten of these sites were Partners for Fragile Families, funded by Ford, and six were Fathers at Work, funded by the Charles Stewart Mott Foundation.


26. In addition to these efforts, The Hogg Foundation for Mental Health in Texas continued the fatherhood work on a regional level through launching a Texas Fragile Families Initiative that endures to this day.

27. Ibid.; and Gilmer, Littles, and Bowers, Momentum.


30. We compared the giving records of “new philanthropy” and “old philanthropy” foundations. We classified foundations as “new” or “old” by the date of founding. Foundations established before 1980 were classified as “old philanthropy”; those begun in or after 1980 were classified as “new philanthropy.” Certain exceptions were made if the donor started the foundation earlier—like the philanthropist Eli Broad—but did not begin to seriously endow and ramp up grant-making activity until after 1980.

31. Among smaller and regional funders, there were two “new philanthropy” funders: the Schott Foundation and the Mitchell Kapor Foundation.

32. Thirty-five of the top fifty largest national foundations fund social issues.

33. Littles, Bowers, and Gilmer, Why We Can’t Wait; and Gilmer et al., Momentum.
35. Ibid., 19.
37. Ibid.
40. Even among those foundations that are socially conservative, the appeal of one of the main strands of work addressing the crisis—fatherhood and marriage—is undeniable. Heather MacDonald, a conservative critic of foundations, characterized the fatherhood work of the Ford Foundation and Annie E. Casey as “pockets of sanity, where a commonsense approach to helping people and promoting stable communities has reigned” (ibid.).
42. For ease of narrative we call these components “steps.” However, this should not be taken to imply a set sequencing. These “steps” reflect the core analytic tasks involved, but in practice they are frequently combined and reordered.
43. Throughout this chapter we refer to the analysts assisting with the strategic planning process as “consultants,” reflecting our own involvement as management consultants; however, this work can be (and frequently is) done by internal foundation staff.
45. Even when the surveys oversample certain minority groups, by the time the consultants have made cuts by age range, the resulting sample size remains far too small. Note that lack of social-science training among consultancies often means that estimates are made without even taking sampling error into consideration.
46. This represents the 90 percent confidence interval, using pooled CPS data across three years.
47. Note that the recent improvement in the ACS now includes institutionalized populations.
49. Ibid., 11.
50. There are too many examples of strategic planning exercises that labeled a program “proven” if it had only internal tracking data showing successful outcomes.
51. By randomly assigning participants, the treatment group and the control group are ostensibly equal in every regard except for receipt of the solution; the researcher can thus be certain that any observed change in outcomes is due to the solution, not to any unobservable characteristics that may also have an impact on the desired outcome.
52. Indeed, the nationwide cumulative impact of such a program on a target
population in terms of numbers of lives saved, college degrees attained, or jail sentences averted can be—and has been—roughly estimated on the basis of the available scientific evidence. Through such an approach the foundation leadership can finally put a “real number” on paper in terms of their organization’s potential effect on society.


54. “Capture” refers to situations in which a state regulatory agency or policymaking body created to act in the public interest instead acts in favor of the commercial or special interests that dominate in the industry or sector it is charged with regulating. “Regulatory capture” is a form of government failure, as it can encourage large firms to produce negative externalities.

55. Levin et al., “Costs and Benefits of an Excellent Education for All.”

56. These ideas are from Brest and Harvey, Money Well Spent.

REFERENCES


MacDonald, Heather. “The Billions of Dollars That Made Things Worse.” City


