Building Better Boyhood Programs

Evaluation of Programs Funded by the African American Men and Boys Task Force Initiative

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Lessons learned

- Engaging in a formal planning process aids program implementation.
- School-based settings facilitate recruitment and implementation.
- Committed leaders who exemplify the program's priorities are essential to the successful implementation and longevity of the initiative.
- Cross-program collaboration provides opportunities for grantees to learn from and support each other.
- Supporting programs with technical assistance and formal evaluation aids implementation.
- Culture, family, and community affect all aspects of program delivery and overall success.

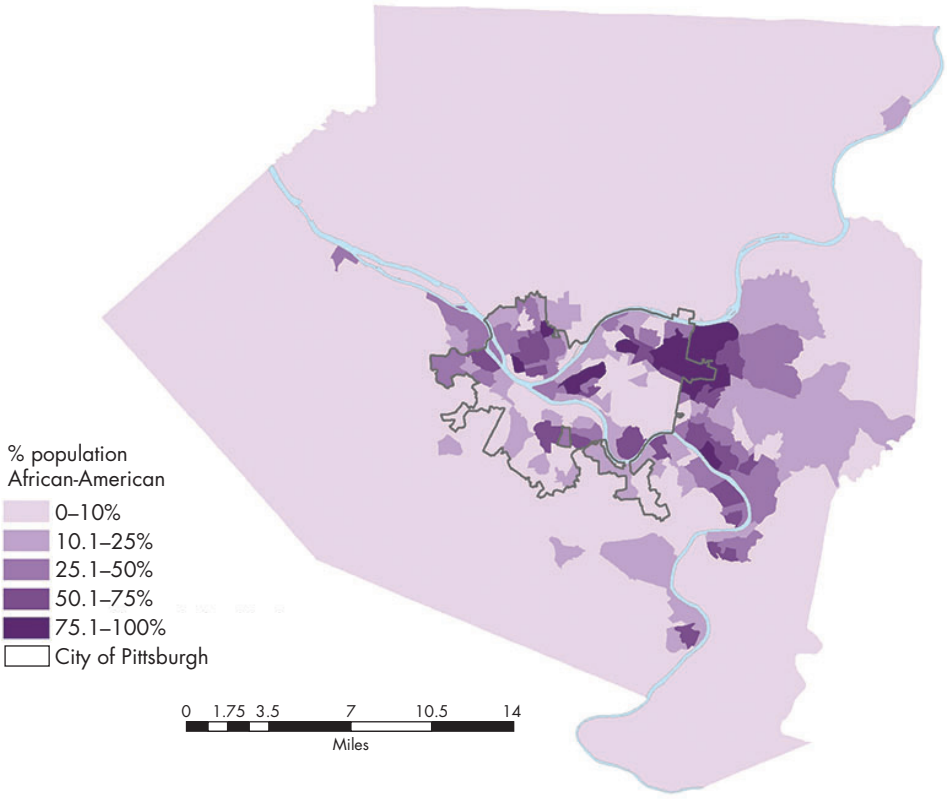
African-American youth in Pittsburgh and Allegheny County in Pennsylvania face the same challenges as many of their peers across the country, including poor employment, education, and criminal justice system outcomes (Wimer and Bloom, 2014). To address these obstacles, human services and community-based programs seek to capitalize on the strengths of youth while recognizing the heterogeneity and interactive nature of both positive and negative individual and environmental influences (Benson et al., 2004). Although these programs often focus on bolstering youth skills (such as academic motivation, self-esteem, and interpersonal competence), implementing them is challenging, and the degree to which these types of programs are effective are not always clear (Quinn, 1999; Wimer and Bloom, 2014). The objective of this report is to evaluate the implementation of a subset of programs funded by The Heinz Endowments' African American Men and Boys Task Force (AAMBTF) initiative in Allegheny County and to understand the programs' operations, whether they made progress toward achieving their goals, and what can be learned from their implementation.

Big Challenges and an Ambitious Response

Allegheny County is home to an estimated 238,000 minors; nearly one in five are African-American (Annie E. Casey Foundation, undated). Concentrated primarily in certain Pittsburgh neighborhoods within the county (Figure 1), African-American residents confront a multitude of inequities (Center on Race and Social Problems, 2015):

- *Stability:* Two-thirds of African-American children in Pittsburgh live in families with a woman as head of household, compared with 25 percent of white children. Nationally, 54 percent of African-American children live in households headed by single women.
- *Poverty:* One-third of African-Americans in Pittsburgh live below the poverty line, compared with 15 percent of whites. Nationally, 24 percent of African-Americans live in poverty.
- *Unemployment:* 17 percent of African-Americans in Pittsburgh are unemployed, compared with 7 percent of whites. Nationally, 15 percent of African-Americans are unemployed.

Figure 1. Where African-Americans Reside in Allegheny County



SOURCE: U.S. Census Bureau (2010).

- *Education:* African-American students in Pittsburgh public schools drop out at higher rates, achieve proficiency in reading and math at lower rates, and graduate from high school at lower rates than their white peers.
- *Health:* African-Americans in Allegheny County have higher infant mortality, lower birth weights, more diabetes, and higher AIDS infection rates than whites do.
- *Crime:* African-Americans under the age of 18 in Pittsburgh face higher overall arrest rates (5,000 per 100,000 individuals) than whites in the same age group (1,000 per 100,000)—and for violent crime and drugs, in particular. Nationally, the juvenile arrest rate for African-Americans is 3,100 per 100,000.

In the face of these inequities, The Heinz Endowments recognized Pittsburgh youth as having tremendous potential and sought to tap into their strengths, skills, and intellect as a way to build resiliency and leadership capacity to help youth overcome the barriers and obstacles they face. Against this backdrop, AAMBTF began an initiative in 2007 to "identify and increase educational, economic, social and leadership opportunities for African-American men and boys in the Pittsburgh region and improve their life outcomes" (Heinz Endowments, 2013). After soliciting input from nonprofit organizations and funders of programs for African-American men and boys and the community, AAMBTF targeted its efforts in four areas:

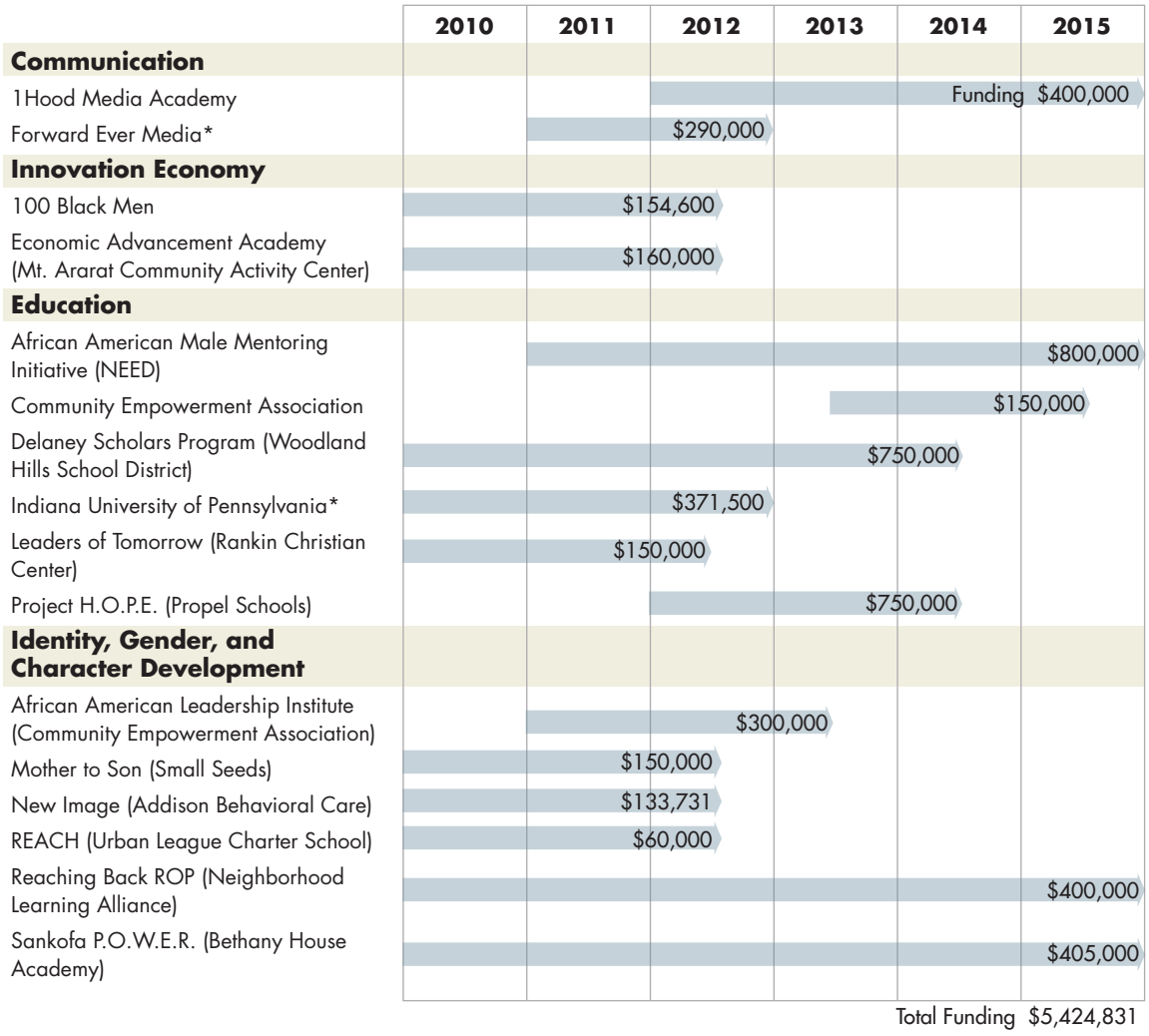
In 2009, AAMBTF developed a strategic plan that laid out goals and strategies for its efforts in each priority area. Its ambitious plan focused not only on community-based programs to serve young African-American males, but also broader efforts to change systems and the context in which

the programs operate. From 2007 through 2013, The Heinz Endowments provided more than $12 million to support the AAMBTF strategic plan, with approximately one-third of these funds granted to local organizations to develop and implement programs and services for young African-Americans, primarily boys and young men (Figure 2). The other funds supported broader efforts, such as the Heinz Fellow program, leadership development, and media/communication strategies.

To lead and manage the initiative and grants, The Heinz Endowments drew on its program officers from the diverse program areas of Arts and Culture, Education, Environment, and Innovation Economy, which later became Community and Economic Development, as well as staff from the foundation's Communications Department. A few grantees received separate pilot or planning grants to develop their programs, while others had planning periods built into their grants. Most of the grantees launched their programs soon after receiving funding.

Throughout the life of the initiative, The Heinz Endowments worked with experts to assess grantees' efforts and provide technical assistance. From 2008 to 2012, the Program to Aid Citizen Enterprise (PACE), a technical assistance provider, worked with a subset of grantees in the Identity, Gender, and Character Development priority area that were implementing Rites of Passage (ROP) programs that used traditional African culture, rituals, and ceremonies to support manhood development. This support was meant to increase continuity across the ROP grantees and facilitate the use of best practice concepts in grantees' program areas and organizational manage-

Figure 2. Overview of the AAMBTF Grantees



*Did not continue with the evaluation through the full implementation period.

ment through education and collaborative activities. Support included a retreat focused on ROP principles and periodic group meetings focused on specific ROP-related topics.

RAND's Role in the Initiative

In 2011, a RAND team was tapped to evaluate how well a subset of the AAMBTF grantees implemented their planned activities and to examine the programs' impacts on participants. In support of the AAMBTF initiative, the evaluation was designed to assess each of the current AAMBTF grantees' implementation processes and their progress toward programmatic goals, as well as to examine outcomes across each of the four priority areas. The evaluation design was guided by the following primary research questions:

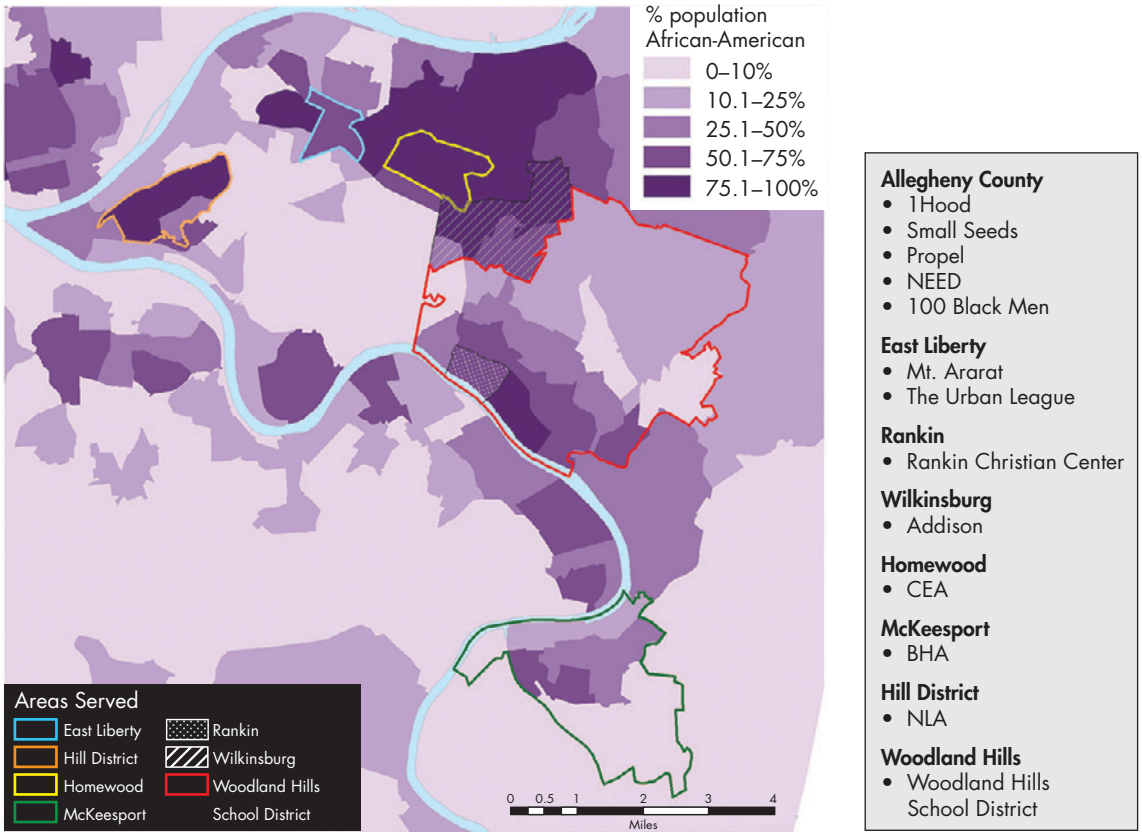
1. How successful has each grantee been in executing its proposed implementation plan?
2. How successful has each grantee been in reaching its stated goals?
3. What collective impact have the AAMBTF programs had within each priority area?

We evaluated 14 of the grantees' programs that were active for all or part of the evaluation period (July 2011 to June 2015), though the levels and lengths of funding varied (Figure 2). Four of the grantees drew program participants from throughout Allegheny County while others focused on specific communities (Figure 3). This report provides an overarching evaluation of the programs during this period to understand how they operated and whether they made progress toward achieving their goals, and to identify best practices and lessons learned so that the initiative can inform other programs targeting African-American communities.

How Program Implementation Was Evaluated

The RAND team's evaluation assessed each grantee's implementation process and progress toward programmatic goals,

Figure 3. Communities Served by AAMBTF Grantees

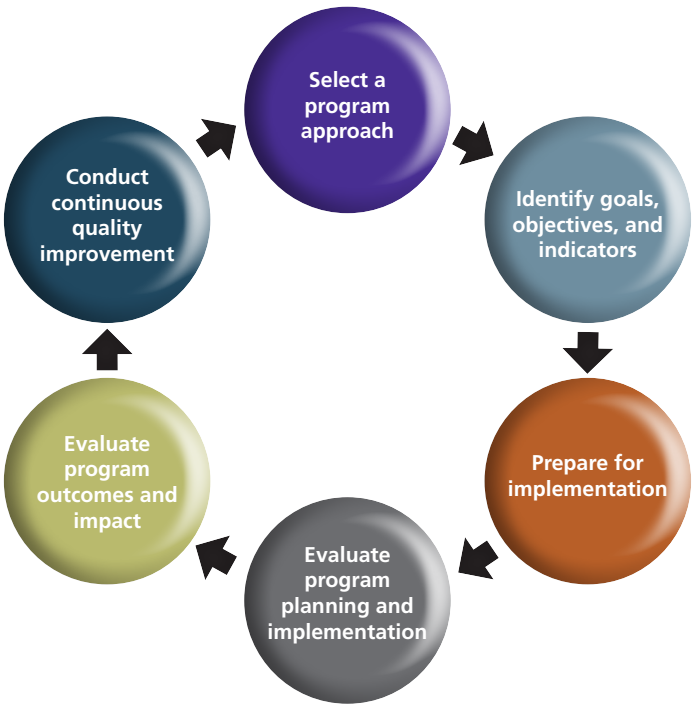


NOTE: Several grantees served youth across all of Allegheny County.
SOURCE: U.S. Census Bureau (2010).

and examined outcomes across the four priority areas. The overall evaluation design drew on principles from RAND's Getting to Outcomes (GTO) framework for program planning, implementation, and evaluation (Chinman, Imm, and Wandersman, 2004; Wandersman, Imm, Chinman, and Kaftarian, 2000). Designed to help communities achieve better outcomes, the GTO framework integrates all of the essential elements of program planning, implementation, and evaluation into a structured, systematic process. We used the GTO framework to help develop metrics to assess the programs' progress, describe how program activities fit with respect to their goals and objectives, and understand their processes for program planning and evaluation, as well as their efforts to build capacity to sustain the program (Figure 4).

The evaluation focused on an ongoing data collection and feedback approach meant to increase grantee capacity for both program implementation and evaluation. Initially, each active grantee participated in a collaborative process with RAND to articulate specific goals and corresponding objectives and to identify indicators or measures of progress for each objective. We then worked closely with each grantee to determine what potential data were available or could be collected to assess process and outcome measures linked to the program's goals.

Figure 4. Evaluation Framework



Throughout the grant period, the RAND research team also provided technical assistance as needed to improve the quality of the information provided and increase the capacity of grantees to monitor and evaluate programs on their own. Using these metrics, we both examined how well the grantees implemented their planned activities and assessed the impact the programs had on participants. Throughout the evaluation period, we worked closely with each active grantee to ensure that program activities stayed aligned with the goals, objectives, and indicators. See Appendix A (Schultz and Sontag-Padilla, 2015) for a complete description of the evaluation data collection methods.[1]

The evaluation described in this report examines how well programs implemented their planned activities (process evaluation), and also assesses the impact that the programs had on participants (outcome evaluation). The process evaluation component assessed progress toward programmatic goals and documented the implementation process, including the barriers and facilitators to implementation using quarterly progress reports, key informant interviews with program directors and program staff, program observations, program performance interviews, document review, and regular e-mail and telephone communication. For the outcome evaluation, we worked with each grantee to determine whether the program was already collecting outcome data or planned to collect outcome data that we could gather and use for secondary data analysis. We used an interactive process with the grantees to determine what potential data were available or could be collected to assess outcomes linked to the program's goals, and we asked the grantees to report on the outcomes data in the quarterly progress reports.

We used the process and outcomes data collected to develop the cross-site analyses in this report. The detailed program profiles describe the development and implementation of each program (Schultz and Sontag-Padilla, 2015, Appendix B). We used the completed program descriptions to synthesize information and identify the factors related to the program context, program features, and implementation processes that are described in the following sections. The quotes that appear throughout the rest of this report were gathered during interviews with program staff.

[1] All appendixes to this report are contained in a separate online document.

PROGRAM FEATURES AND IMPACT ON IMPLEMENTATION

While all the grantees' programs aimed to increase educational and leadership opportunities for young African-Americans, the programs' features varied widely. The evaluation examined key characteristics, such as whom the programs served, where the programs operated, how they identified potential participants, how much contact the programs had with the youths, and what program components were delivered (Table 1). Additionally, we examined the potential impact that each of these factors had on program development and implementation.

Target population. The 14 grantees focused primarily on boys in middle school and high school, and they faced the challenges typical of programs for these age groups. Program staff reported that high-school students often had sports, work, and family responsibilities that limited their ability to participate in activities outside the school day. Middle-school students, meanwhile, were prone to behavior, such as goofing off during sessions, not paying attention to program staff, and making jokes during serious discussions, that hindered delivery of program content.

Program setting. Six programs were set at schools with participants drawn from the student population, while the other eight were set at community-based locations that drew participants from different schools. Programs operating at schools tapped school or district resources, staff, and infrastructure to support activities such as training staff, collecting data, and developing relationships with community-based partners. Community-based programs had varied levels of resources, from those with a small staff and only one program to larger agencies with multiple staff and programs. The impact of program setting on recruitment, retention, and implementation varied across grantees. While school-based settings generally facilitated operations, program staff reported that having buy-in and support from school administration and staff was important and not experienced by all school-based programs.

Most programs were conducted after school or on weekends. Although attendance was more difficult due to extracurricular activities and transportation issues, these programs had more time for activities than programs conducted during school hours. The programs that operated during the school day were limited to the lunch period or had to pull participants from class, making it challenging to complete the materials over the course of the program year.

Program staff. The most common staffing structure for operating the programs involved the use of new or existing personnel from within the organization. Other grantees used a combination of existing internal staff and contracted staff. The number of staff members available to implement the program components varied by grantee, as did the staff-to-participant ratio. Some grantees closely aligned staff numbers with enrollment, enabling them to deliver a more efficient and structured program while still providing the necessary attention to program participants. In contrast, other programs relied heavily on a single facilitator or program director for implementation. Additionally, several grantees utilized a program coordinator across multiple sites, which encouraged frequent discussion of implementation challenges and how to resolve them programwide. Overall, program staff members described during interviews how they were committed to their respective programs, and how they worked to build a rapport and effectively engage with participants. Program directors reported that having leadership and program staff dedicated to program priorities both within and outside of group sessions supported implementation and helped foster high levels of engagement and connectedness among participants.

Referral sources. Generally, programs that worked within the schools capitalized on existing relationships or developed close relationships with school administrators, positioning the programs to successfully identify and recruit participants. Alternatively, programs in community-based settings relied on referrals from external organizations—schools (though the relationships were not as strong as with school-based programs), community agencies, and families—as well as their own outreach efforts (e.g., flyers, Facebook, community events). Although this expanded the pool of potential participants, it also diluted the programs' ability to forge close relationships

> "The students are the biggest ambassadors for the program; they really are key to recruitment."
>
> —Quote gathered during interviews with program staff

Table 1. The Evaluated Grantee Program Features

Program/Grantee	Target Population	Program Setting	Referrals	Group Session Frequency	Program Components
Communication					
1Hood Media Academy	Ages 14–19	After school and during summer at community-based location	Referrals from schools, personal social networks, and community agencies	Twice per week for 2–3 hours each	Group instructional sessions; mentoring and training in media production; performance, leadership, and employment opportunities
Innovation Economy/Community & Economic Development					
100 Black Men	Ages 14–18	Saturdays at a central location in the community	Referrals from principals and counselors at area high schools, and self-referrals	Weekly for 3 hours	Group mentoring sessions; individual tutoring and SAT preparation; senior seminars; entrepreneurial/ financial skills activities and competition
Economic Advancement Academy (Mt. Ararat Community Activity Center)	Grades 6–8	After school at church-based community center	Internal referrals from existing mentoring and other programs	Twice weekly for 2 hours	Group instructional sessions; individual mentoring; community activities and field trips
Education					
African American Male Mentoring Initiative (NEED)	Ages 14–18	During school at high schools	Referrals from principals, counselors, and teachers at host high schools	Weekly for 45–60 minutes	Group mentoring sessions; individual education and goal plans; individual advising; college and educational tour; conferences and events
Community Empowerment Association	Ages 14–18	During school at several schools	Referrals from school administrators at host schools	Weekly for 60–90 minutes	Individual assessment and relationship-building; intensive case management; group sessions/ workshops; education support; family involvement
Delaney Scholars Program (Woodland Hills School District)	Grades 5–12	During and after school at eight schools in the district	Internal referrals from school professional staff and parents	Weekly for 30–45 minutes	Group instructional sessions, classroom visits, academic monitoring and support, individual tutoring, family and community activities, staff professional development
Leaders of Tomorrow (Rankin Christian Center)	Ages 16–24	After school at a church-based community center	Internal referrals from existing after-school programs	Monthly for 2–3 hours	Group leadership sessions, individual mentoring, case management, exposure/celebration activities
Project H.O.P.E. (Propel)	Grades 5–12	During and after school at nine schools in the district	Internal referrals from teachers, guidance counselors, and school administrators	Weekly for 60–90 minutes	Individual pullout sessions, individual education and goal plans, group instructional sessions, staff professional development, summer academy
Identity, Gender, and Character Development					
African-American Leadership Institute (Community Empowerment Association)	Ages 12–18	After school at community-based location	Internal referrals from existing programs	2–4 times per week for 2 hours	Group leadership/passage workshops, exposure to African-American male leaders and cultural experiences, youth component to Commission for African-American Affairs, career development and training projects, individual assessment and monitoring
Mother to Son (Small Seeds)	Ages 8–15	After school and on weekends at church or community-based locations	Internal referrals from existing family support program	Biweekly for 90 minutes	Rituals and ceremonies, academic monitoring and support, group workshop and exposure activities, community service, physical wellness
New Image (Addison Behavioral Care)	Ages 11–14	After school at church-based community center	Referrals from coaches and parents from partnering football league	Weekly	Group workshops, individual writing assignments and journal entries, rituals and ceremonies, exposure activities and field trips, community service and engagement
REACH (Urban League Charter School)	Grades 3–5	During school at one school	Internal referrals from teachers, guidance counselors, and school administrators at host school	Twice per week for 45 minutes each	Group instructional sessions, group workshops/ exposure activities, ceremonies and rituals
Reaching Back ROP (Neighborhood Learning Alliance)	Youth program: Ages 14–18	After school and on weekends at one school	Referrals from families, students, and staff at the host school	Twice per week for 2–3 hours each	Group mentoring sessions, academic monitoring and support, manhood training, arts and cultural experiences, health, retreats, ceremonies and rituals, community engagement
	Adult program: adult males	Weekday evenings at community-based location	Referrals from community and word of mouth	Once per week for 2–3 hours each	Group instructional sessions, group workshops, group projects, retreats, monthly booster sessions
Sankofa P.O.W.E.R. (Bethany House Academy)	Ages 11–17	After school and during summer at community-based location	Referrals from community, families, and students	Weekly for 2–4 hours	Group workshops/exposure activities, ceremonies and rituals, community engagement, academic monitoring and support

with specific referral sources. Across all grantees, program staff found that word of mouth from participants and their families proved to be an effective source of referrals.

Cross-program collaboration. Early in the grant period, the ROP grantees participated in cross-program collaboration seminars initially established by The Heinz Endowments and designed for sharing information and networking with other grantees with similar programming. Some of the ROP grantees initially struggled to operationalize the ROP concepts into program activities. The structured networking opportunities that were offered through a technical assistance provider led to collaborative learning, with some grantees later contracting staff from other ROP programs to assist in program design and implementation. However, grantees in other priority areas were less connected to each other despite experiencing many of the same challenges around working in the schools or engaging middle- and high-school students.

Program intensity. The programs varied in the amount of time participants engaged in activities. Most grantees met for group or individual sessions weekly for one to four hours (seven programs) or twice per week for 45–60 minutes (five programs). Although the higher-intensity programs provided more opportunities for education and interaction, program staff reported difficulty in maintaining consistent attendance and engagement. Conversely, programs with less contact time may have had better participation but often could not cover all the content.

Program components. Group sessions were the core activity for almost all the programs. Often, a structured curriculum outlined specific topics and activities for each session. Other grantees had more-general implementation plans that laid out an overall outline for the group sessions and other program components but allowed more flexibility in program delivery. Having more-detailed implementation plans helped grantees implement programs that were more focused and had a closer match between program goals and program components—in turn, improving the likelihood of accomplishing primary goals. Many programs supplemented the group sessions with academic support, such as tutoring or education goal planning; exposure activities, such as field trips or guest speakers; and community or family engagement activities.

In the Identity, Gender, and Character Development priority area, the grantees implemented ROP programs. ROP are an African tradition that intentionally guides a person's holistic development through life's transitions using cultural learning, rituals, and ceremonies to discover their purpose and responsibility to build healthy and just communities. Guided by the Nguzo Saba principles of Kwanzaa (unity, self-determination, collective work and responsibility, cooperative economics, purpose, creativity, and faith), ROP programs help guide participants through the transition from boyhood to manhood, which is marked by growth within a variety of areas or domains of self-development. ROP programs are designed to foster personal development, cultural awareness, and a sense of belonging through participation in educational sessions, rituals, and ceremonies. Overall, the ROP programs were comprehensive, but this comprehensive approach meant they were spread thin, which limited their ability to see improvements in targeted areas.

Program Descriptions

Communication

- **1Hood Media Academy.** The program was designed to teach African-American youth and young adults how to critically analyze media messages, broaden their experience of media, and create their own media. The goal was to improve self-image, dispel stereotypes, encourage entrepreneurialism, and provide a positive forum of self-expression. Participants attended biweekly group sessions focused on examining African-American male imagery in music, advertising, television, and film, and creating media such as videos, blogs, and music tracks.

Innovation Economy/Community and Economic Development

- **100 Black Men.** This expanded an existing mentoring program for high-school students to include financial literacy. In addition to financial literacy, group mentoring sessions every Saturday focused on such areas as public speaking, technology and networking, culture, and community service. The program also included weekly tutoring or SAT preparation sessions, a seminar series for high-school seniors, and a financial skills competition.
- **Economic Advancement Academy.** Developed by the Mount Ararat Community Center, the Academy provided a culturally relevant program focused on entrepreneurship, business principles, and vocational guidance for African-American middle-school boys. The after-school program offered twice-weekly group sessions that included business plan development, individual mentoring, and community activities/field trips.

Education

- **African American Male Mentoring Initiative** (AAMI). Designed by Negro Educational Emergency Drive (NEED) to empower at-risk youths in high-school to make positive choices that enable them to stay in school and maximize their potential, the school-based program offered weekly group mentoring, help with developing individual education plans and goals, individual college counseling, and the opportunity to tour historically black colleges and universities.
- **Community Empowerment Association (CEA).** The program was designed to increase the capacity of an existing truancy prevention program to address the needs of African-American boys at risk of dropping out of school. Components included assessment and relationship-building activities, intensive case management, group sessions/workshops, and family involvement activities.
- **Delaney Scholars Program.** Woodland Hills School District's program used the nine characteristics of the Scholar Identity Model (SIM) to support the academic success and broader educational aspirations of African-American middle- and high-school boys. The SIM framework promotes academic achievement and confidence by shaping how African-American and minority students view themselves as learners. SIM focuses on development and growth in nine areas: self-efficacy, future orientation, willingness to make sacrifices, internal locus of control, self-awareness, strong need for achievement, academic self-confidence, race pride, and masculinity. The program included pull-out sessions with elementary school students, after-school group tutoring sessions for junior- and senior-high school students, family events, community partnership activities, a summer transition program, and professional and curriculum development for all district schools.
- **Leaders of Tomorrow.** Designed by the Rankin Christian Center, the program aimed to provide African-American males ages 16–24 with academic proficiency, leadership skills, self-esteem, and advancement opportunities. The after-school program offered monthly group leadership sessions, mentoring, case management, and celebration/exposure activities.
- **Project H.O.P.E.** (Healthy Opportunities to Pursue Excellence). Similar to the Delaney Scholar's Program, Propel Schools' program was developed to bring the nine SIM principles to middle- and high-school African-American boys in Propel charter schools. The school-based program offered weekly pullout sessions between a program coordinator and youth, weekly after-school group sessions, staff professional development for administrators and teachers at all schools, and a summer academy for any interested Propel student.

Identity, Gender, and Character Development

- **African American Leadership Institute** (AALI). Designed by the Community Empowerment Association (CEA), this program aimed to increase leadership, social, and economic skills of high-risk, urban, African-American youth. The after-school program offered group leadership/passage workshops several times per week, exposure to African-American male leaders and experiences, a youth component to the Commission for African American Affairs, and career development and training projects.
- **Mother to Son.** This Small Seeds ROP program was designed to help African-American males ages eight to 15 develop skills for the transition from childhood to adulthood. Program activities included biweekly after-school workshops, monthly Saturday workshops, retreats, and special events. Activities focused on four areas: individual, academics, community, and physical wellness.
- **New Image.** Addison Behavioral Care's ROP program was designed to provide African-American boys ages nine to 12 with opportunities to grow in personal and cultural identity. The program offered weekly after-school group workshops, writing assignments, rituals and ceremonies, exposure activities and field trips, and community engagement activities. Participants worked to meet specific criteria to progress through the program's three phases (history and identity, society and education, and community service).
- **REACH.** This Urban League of Greater Pittsburgh Charter School program was designed to provide African-American boys ages six to 11 the opportunity to participate in an ROP experience focused on identity, gender, and character development. Utilizing ceremonies and rituals, cultural workshops and projects, and exposure activities, the REACH program helped students develop a deeper sense of self, a connection with the broader community, and an awareness of African-American culture.

- **Reaching Back.** This Neighborhood Learning Alliance (NLA) ROP program was designed to help African-American boys ages 14–18 better understand who they are as African-American men, scholars, and members of the community. The program included mentoring, academic support, manhood training, arts and cultural experiences, health activities, and ceremonies/rituals. In addition, the program focused on promoting growth in individual, academic, community, and physical fitness guided by Nguzo Saba principles. In 2014, NLA developed the Sankofa Leadership Institute to foster a network of adult African-American male leaders in Pittsburgh who seek to infuse greater identity/character development and leadership training in their work with African-American male youth.
- **Sankofa P.O.W.E.R.** (Positive Outcomes with Excuses Removed). This Bethany House Academy (BHA) program was designed to provide an African-centered ROP program for boys and girls ages nine to 17 aimed at facilitating greater purpose and identity as an African-American. Through weekly after-school and summer sessions and the use of manhood/womanhood exposure activities, ceremonies and rituals, mentoring, community engagement, and academic monitoring and support, BHA planned to address seven transformative domains (individual, family, school, peers, neighborhood, technology, and health). In 2014, BHA broadened its program framework to reflect the new Healthy Village Learning Institute, targeting African-American males and females ages 13–21.

EVALUATING PROGRAM IMPLEMENTATION AND OUTCOMES

Though the programs differed in many ways, they also held some common goals, sought similar outcomes, and had parallel indicators that were used to measure their progress—all of which were identified at the beginning of each grant period (see Tables 2a, 2b, and 2c). Each program's activities were revisited

Table 2A. AAMBTF Grantee Process Goals and Outcomes

Grantee	Process Goals/Outcomes				
	Received mentoring, instruction, or case management	Had leadership, entrepreneurial, or performance opportunities	Exposed to education or career options, conducted educational or career goal planning	Supported family and community involvement	Provided staff development and training
Communication					
1Hood Media Academy	X	X			
Innovation Economy/Community & Economic Development					
100 Black Men	X		X		
Mt. Ararat Community Activity Center	X		X	X	
Education					
Community Empowerment Association	X			X	
NEED	X	X	X		
Propel	X		X		X
Rankin Christian Center	X	X	X		
Woodland Hills School District	X			X	X
Identity, Gender, and Character Development					
Addison Behavioral Care	X				
Bethany House Academy	X	X	X	X	
Community Empowerment Association	X	X	X	X	
Neighborhood Learning Alliance	X	X		X	
Small Seeds	X				
Urban League Charter School	X	X		X	
Total	**100%**	**50%**	**50%**	**50%**	**14%**

Table 2B. AAMBTF Grantee Individual-Level Goals and Outcomes

Grantee	Individual-Level Goals/Outcomes		
	Improved knowledge or attitudes or behaviors	Improved education outcomes (e.g., grade point average [GPA], high school graduation, applied to college, attended postsecondary education)	Improved school outcomes (e.g., attendance, absences, disciplinary/behavior problems)
Communication			
1Hood Media Academy	X		
Innovation Economy/Community & Economic Development			
100 Black Men	X	X	
Mt. Ararat Community Activity Center	X	X	
Education			
Community Empowerment Association		X	X
NEED		X	
Propel		X	X
Rankin Christian Center	X	X	
Woodland Hills School District	X	X	X
Identity, Gender, and Character Development			
Addison Behavioral Care			
Bethany House Academy			
Community Empowerment Association	X	X	X
Neighborhood Learning Alliance			
Small Seeds			
Urban League Charter School	X		
Total	**50%**	**57%**	**29%**

quarterly to ensure that they still aligned with the program's goals, objectives, and indicators. This ongoing review allowed grantees to make changes as needed, identify implementation challenges, and develop strategies to address them.

To provide an overview of the grantees, we examined common indicators of program delivery, such as enrollment and participation, along with other measures of the implementation process. Then, we looked at the more-limited information on individual-level outcomes to try to understand the overall impact of the programs on participants. Broadly, programs focused on changing knowledge and attitudes, improving education and school outcomes, and moving through the levels within ROP domains. While outcomes varied by grantee, most grantees faced similar challenges in identifying appropriate measures and collecting data to assess outcomes. For detailed descriptions of the implementation of each program and an overall assessment of progress toward program goals, see Appendix B (Schultz and Sontag-Padilla, 2015).

> "We structure the sessions with consistency so youth can find comfort, have a place to be open with people willing to listen, and where they feel they can be themselves."
>
> —Quote gathered during interviews with program staff

Table 2C. AAMTF Grantee ROP Domains and Goal Areas

Grantee	ROP Domains/Goal Areas						
	Individual Goal	Family Goal	Academic Goal	Peer Goal	Community Goal	Technology Goal	Physical Goal
Communication							
1Hood Media Academy							
Innovation Economy/Community & Economic Development							
100 Black Men							
Mt. Ararat Community Activity Center							
Education							
Community Empowerment Association							
NEED							
Propel							
Rankin Christian Center							
Woodland Hills School District							
Identity, Gender, and Character Development							
Addison Behavioral Care	X		X		X		
Bethany House Academy	X	X	X	X	X	X	
Community Empowerment Association							
Neighborhood Learning Alliance	X		X		X		X
Small Seeds	X		X		X		X
Urban League Charter School	X	X			X		
Total	**83%**	**33%**	**67%**	**17%**	**83%**	**17%**	**33%**

Evaluating Program Implementation

The AAMBTF grantees served hundreds of youths during the evaluation period of 2011–2015 (Figure 5). The number of participants ranged from 376 to 603 per year, depending on the number of active grantees. Individually, grantees planned to enroll 20–180 participants and most grantees met or came very close to meeting their targets (Table 3). Average enrollment per grantee grew from 44 in the 2011–2012 program year to 81 in 2013–2014, tapering off somewhat to 76 in 2014–2015 as some of the larger grantees completed their project periods.

To serve these participants, the grantees implemented various program components using a mix of mentors, group facilitators, case managers, and other staff (Tables 2a, 2b, and 2c). While the previous section described each program individually, here we evaluate the programs as a whole.

Mentoring, instruction, and case management. As noted, most grantees conducted group sessions or instructional workshops. Reported attendance ranged from 50 percent to 72 percent, with some programs making marked improvement from one year to the next. About half the grantees set attendance goals exceeding 80 percent, but none was able to achieve such an ambitious target. Nonetheless, the group sessions enabled program staff to build relationships with participants, deliver the program content, and provide a safe forum for discussion among peers. With ongoing reinforcement, learned behaviors such as being respectful and polite became the norm for the groups.

Many grantees supplemented the group sessions with related mentoring, tutoring, college advising, or case management activities. Generally, these individualized activities helped program staff strengthen their relationships with participants and tailor support to each youth's needs. However, one-on-one contact was often limited to a few sessions because of time and resource constraints.

Leadership, entrepreneurial, and performance opportunities. Several grantees offered leadership, entrepreneurial, and performance opportunities to help youth develop skills and gain firsthand experience. For example, participants in 1Hood

Figure 5. Total Enrollment in AAMBTF Programs, 2011–2015

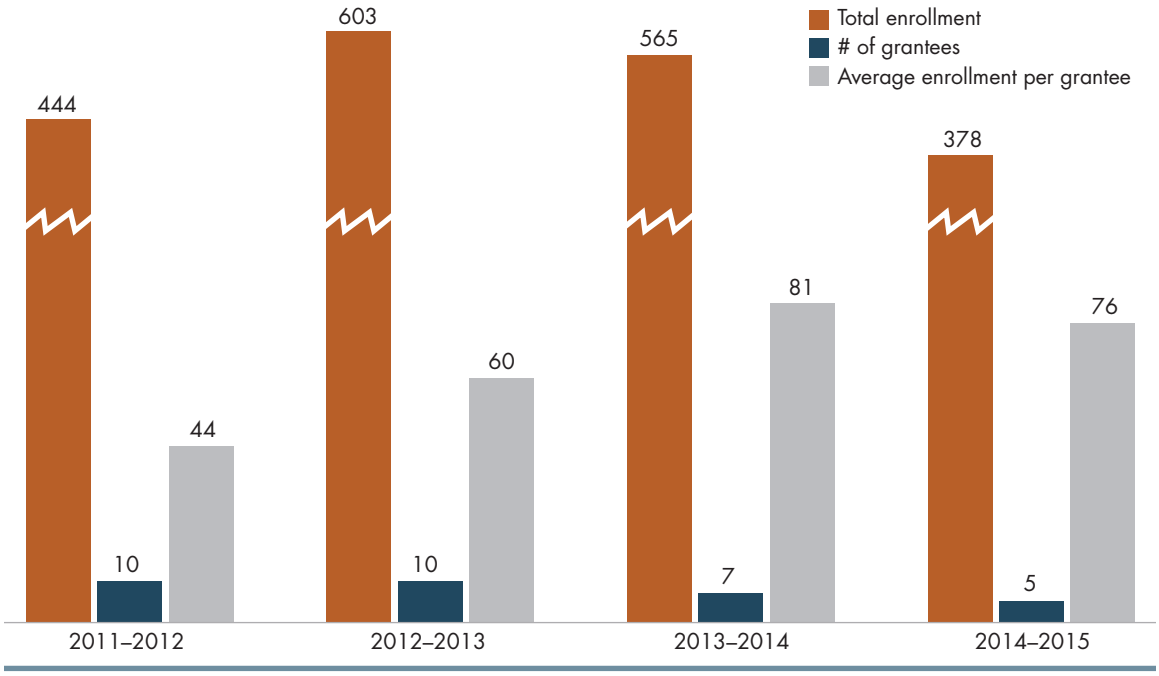


Table 3. Targets vs. Actual Enrollment by Grantee

Grantee	Target Enrollment	Program Year Total Enrollment			
		2011–2012	2012–2013	2013–2014	2014–2015
Communication					
1Hood Media Academy	20–50 per cohort	—	25	26	20
Innovation Economy/Community & Economic Development					
100 Black Men	40–60 per year	42	45	—	—
Economic Advancement Academy (Mt. Ararat Community Activity Center)	25 total	26	19	—	—
Education					
African American Male Mentoring Initiative (NEED)	60 in years 1–3, 170 in year 4	112	112	142	208
Community Empowerment Association	30 per year	—	—	17	25
Delaney Scholars Program (Woodland Hills School District)	135 per year	—	102	146	—
Leaders of Tomorrow (Rankin Christian Center)	40 total	74 (total), 20–25 (at any time)	—	—	—
Project H.O.P.E. (Propel)	180 per year	—	180	170	—
Identity, Gender, and Character Development					
African American Leadership Institute (Community Empowerment Association)	50 total	27	19	—	—
Mother to Son (Small Seeds)	None specified	35	—	—	—
New Image (Addison Behavioral Care)	40	25	—	—	—
REACH (Urban League Charter School)	45 in year 1, 25 in year 2	49	23	—	—
Reaching Back ROP (Neighborhood Learning Alliance)	30 per year	29	33	29	27
Sankofa P.O.W.E.R. (Bethany House Academy)	50 per year	25	45	35	98

> "It is possible to appear to be doing well overall but still have some personal struggles that prevent youth from being successful. We need to tailor services, support, and the approach depending on what they are struggling with."
>
> —Quote gathered during interviews with program staff

Media Academy created, produced, and disseminated videos, music tracks, blogs, and photographs that portrayed black males in a positive light. Other grantees provided entrepreneurial activities (designing, producing, and selling a product) or leadership opportunities (having participants plan and facilitate program activities or represent the program at community events). These types of opportunities allowed participants to develop and use skills in a real-world setting.

Education, career, and employment planning and exposure experiences. Several grantees helped youth to develop long-range education and career plans and to articulate the short-term and intermediate steps needed to achieve them. Other programs used guest speakers and field trips to expose youths to education, career, and employment options. As one example, some NEED participants toured historically black colleges and universities that broadened their perspective on postsecondary options. Some ROP programs exposed participants to African-centered media (e.g., movies, music, documentaries), literature, and activities (e.g., drumming circles). In addition, a subset of participants that completed domain requirements of the program were approved by a Council of Elders to participate in a guided trip to Ghana, which introduced youth to aspects of their African heritage.

Family involvement. Many grantees sought to engage families in the program by hosting events for program staff, participants, and their relatives, or by making individual contacts. While events such as potluck dinners, movie nights, or topical workshops were generally well attended, the programs often struggled to connect with families and form meaningful collaborative relationships to support the youth. Woodland Hills School District worked to stay connected with families through periodic newsletters about the progress and activities of junior-high participants. Other grantees (e.g., NLA and BHA) focused heavily on improving parent-child relationships through monitoring weekly family plans and calling parents to check on their child's progress.

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Staff development and training. Two grantees' goals were related to professional staff development and school culture involving SIM and academic achievement, though the outcomes were mixed according to program staff. Propel arranged a series of professional development sessions and established a routine of mutually supportive staff interactions. As a result, SIM principles were better accepted and integrated into classrooms, and collaboration increased across the school system. In contrast, Woodland Hills School District increased its focus on professional development activities

but encountered continued resistance to SIM principles from the school board, administrators, and school staff.

Evaluating Program Outcomes

As part of their initial proposal and program planning, each grantee identified at least some individual-level outcomes and then worked to collect relevant data to assess their progress. During our involvement with the evaluation, each active grantee participated in a collaborative process with us to evaluate their specific goals and corresponding objectives and to identify indicators or measures of progress for each objective. We then worked closely with each grantee to determine what potential data were available or could be collected to assess outcomes linked to the program's goals and provided technical assistance as needed to improve the quality of the information provided and increase grantee capacity for evaluation. This level of technical assistance and evaluation support encouraged continuous quality improvement practices and helped reduce measurement challenges related to aligning goals and objectives with outcomes.

Whenever possible, we collected data from grantees on individual-level outcomes and used them for our secondary data analysis to gauge progress or change at the individual level. The targeted individual-level outcomes covered two primary areas: knowledge or attitudes in relevant areas (e.g., financial literacy, media literacy, future aspirations, attitudes toward education), and education (e.g., GPA, high school graduation rate, college enrollment rate) and school outcomes (e.g., absences, tardiness, disciplinary/behavior problems). The ROP grantees also attempted to track progression and transition through the ROP domains at the individual level. Within each outcome area, the grantees faced challenges articulating specific objectives and finding appropriate measures or indicators to examine change over time. Overall, this meant that it was difficult to assess outcomes at the individual level and determine if grantees met individual-level objectives. Additionally, grantees expressed difficulties accounting for the impact of systemic and underlying issues (e.g., exposure to community violence, lack of coordination between the agencies and systems working with families), as well as more-immediate family needs (e.g., ability to work, lack of resources, safety) on individual-level progress within the programs. Finally, because of the wide variability across grantees in goals, objectives, and measures, it was not possible to accurately assess the collective impact of this set of grantees that were part of the evaluation of the AAMBTF initiative.

Improved knowledge or attitudes. While several grantees sought to improve participants' knowledge or attitudes, they struggled to find appropriate ways to measure improvement, missed opportunities to collect baseline data, or failed to collect enough pre- and postintervention data to determine whether the program had this kind of impact. That said, there was some evidence of greater knowledge about specific topics. For example, the two Innovation Economy/Community and Economic

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> "When we go on (campus) tours, we see the transformation as the students understand what education could look like."
>
> —Quote gathered during interviews with program staff

SUSAN CHIANG/ISTOCK

Development grantees developed and administered surveys before and after the program regarding specific modules in the curriculum and reported increased financial literacy.

Improved education/school outcomes. All Innovation Economy/Community and Economic Development and Education grantees sought to improve educational outcomes, and most programs saw improvements in some of the individual-level outcomes. Grantees that were able to track education or school outcomes data over time reported that all or the vast majority of seniors graduated from high school and enrolled in postsecondary education, and that minimum GPA targets were met. However, because most of the outcomes tended to be longer term (e.g., college enrollment), difficult to change because many other factors might affect them (e.g., GPA), or required data that were either challenging to access or were not well connected to program goals (e.g., school absences, behavioral/disciplinary referrals), many programs did not demonstrate significant change in education or school outcomes during the tracking period.

Progression/transition through ROP program domain levels. As discussed in the previous section, ROP programs are designed to guide youth through the transition from boyhood to manhood, focusing on growth within a set of self-development domains (e.g., individual identity, academics, family, community, peers). The ROP grantees varied in their ability to specify the criteria required to advance through ROP levels for the various domains and/or to report how many youth met those requirements and transitioned to the next level. Some grantees tracked the percentage of youth who met the overall requirements for transitioning through the different domains, reporting percentages that ranged from 72 percent to 100 percent. In contrast, others reported on a range of indicators of progress within the domains.

LESSONS LEARNED AND FUTURE DIRECTIONS

Based on our evaluation of key program features, the implementation process, and individual-level outcomes of a subset

> "We try to work with the families in terms of needs. That's our carrot with the parents. When they have a need (like accompanying a parent to a meeting with teachers), then we are able to engage with the parents further. They know they can call us when they need us and we will help them with their concerns."
>
> —Quote gathered during interviews with program staff

> "It is easier to have kids' buy-in when activities are in the school."
>
> —Quote gathered during interviews with program staff

of the programs funded under the AAMBTF initiative, we identified areas in which grantees had success but also experienced challenges. During the evaluation period, grantees served hundreds of youth in the Pittsburgh area. All grantees worked to deliver programs that were culturally relevant for African-American young men, were tailored to youths' community and home circumstances, and addressed individual needs. Despite these successes, grantees encountered factors that affected implementation and the likelihood of achieving predetermined goals set forth during the proposal process. Through our evaluation, we found that programs benefited from structured planning before being implemented, ongoing evaluation and technical assistance while they were in operation, and cross-program collaboration throughout the implementation process. We also learned that recruitment and implementation were easiest for programs set in schools, and that recruiting African-American males as role models was important but sometimes challenging. Finally, it is clear that family, culture, and community all had an effect on both implementation and outcomes.

Importantly, whether factors or specific program features served as facilitators or barriers to implementation, and ultimately success in outcomes, depended largely on the circumstances of the program. For instance, school-based settings facilitated implementation, but largely within schools that demonstrated buy-in and support from school administration and staff. Additionally, some challenges of program implementation are inherent to small, grassroots organizations that have limited staffing and resources and that attempt to develop, implement, and monitor youth programs to address complex issues. With RAND's help, all the grantees worked consistently and continuously to adapt to these challenges to better serve their youth.

We identified lessons learned that provide some context for grantees' successes and challenges. We list those next, along with recommendations for future directions for this or similar initiatives.

Lessons Learned

Engaging in a formal planning process aids implementation. Programs with a structured curriculum or detailed implementation plan were better able to maintain interest and engagement among at least a core group of youth. Developing an implementation plan that clearly delineates the connections among goals, activities, and expected outcomes helped ensure that programs stayed on target and improved the likelihood they would accomplish their goals. Despite pilot or planning grants to develop their programs or built-in planning periods, some grantees' planning efforts were largely unstructured and lacked clearly defined steps to ensure that the programs were ready to launch. Other grantees struggled to develop a cohesive curriculum or implementation plan in line with their proposed program goals; this ultimately affected their ability to implement the program or advance their goals. Building on

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an existing program did appear to facilitate implementation, as grantees began their programs more quickly and ultimately prolonged their opportunity to make an impact.

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School-based settings facilitate recruitment and implementation. Overall, programs based in schools facilitated implementation because they had more access to referrals, resources, and infrastructure that were not generally available to programs operating in a community-based setting. While school-based programs were able to capitalize on relationships with school administrators, their relative success depended on buy-in from administrators and staff, which required continually cultivating a positive working relationship. Buy-in and support from school staff and administration not only facilitate implementation, but also reinforce program goals and priorities outside the program sessions. Community-based programs, particularly smaller ones with few staff members, need initial and ongoing support that is tailored to their needs and focuses on developing staff capacity and organizational infrastructure for program planning and implementation (e.g., technical assistance for drafting recruitment and retention plans, identifying evidence-based programs or strategies, or developing curriculum or program materials), developing referral pathways, and tracking school-related outcomes.

Working with middle-school and high-school boys brings inherent challenges to implementation. All programs faced challenges recruiting and retaining boys in middle and high school due to competing demands and transportation issues. Programs that delivered after-school sessions on-site experienced fewer participation challenges (e.g., transportation, conflicting classroom schedules/lunch schedules). While programs that operated during the school day avoided conflicts with extracurricular activities, work, or family responsibilities, they had to work within the confines of a lunch break or class period, making it difficult to complete the program materials. Programs that reached youth through supplemental sessions or one-on-one meetings *in addition* to the regular sessions more often had consistent contact. Typical middle-school behavior, such as joking and goofing off, made it more difficult to deliver program content, but when program staff were able to set and consistently reinforce rules for the group sessions and had flexibility in how the content was delivered, they were better able to manage the group sessions.

Having leadership, staff, and role models who are committed to and exemplify the program's priorities is essential to the successful implementation and longevity of the initiative. All programs stressed the importance of having positive African-American male program leaders to foster youth engagement and commitment. For the school-based programs in particular, program leaders emphasized how vital it was for

> "The support has been tremendous. We feel very supported, and our ideas are valued."
>
> —Quote gathered during interviews with program staff

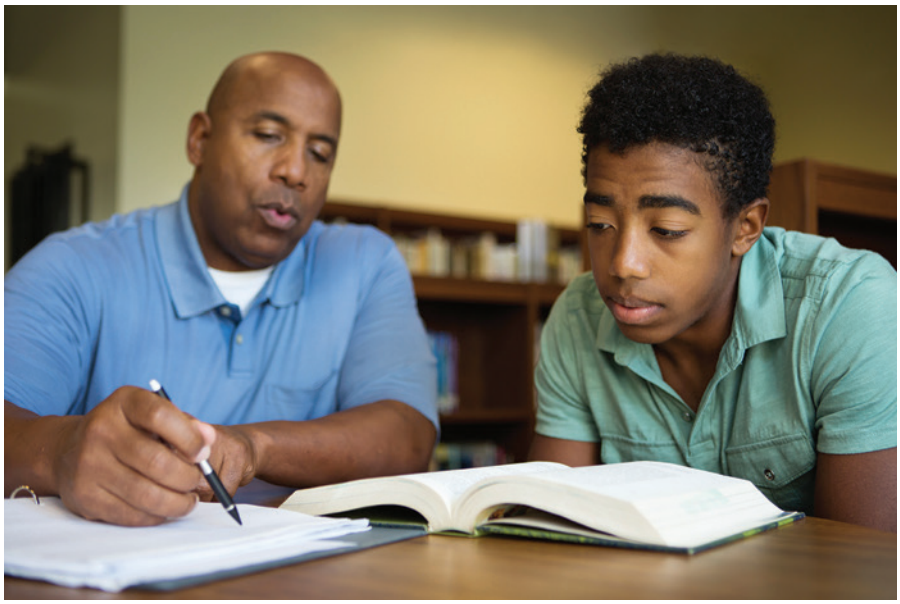
> "There are broader social issues that impact parents. You need to make sure the foundations, community, agencies, and systems are involved at the table to engage in a broader collaboration and discussion about what the family needs."
>
> —Quote gathered during interviews with program staff

the participants, and even other schoolmates, to see positive African-American male role models walking through the halls and taking a strong interest in the participants' success and well-being. Some grantees struggled with recruiting these men as a core part of their program; however, when possible they engaged outside speakers or community members to work with the youth and act as role models.

In addition, having a leader who can coordinate within and across the different components ensured consistency in program delivery, promoted coordination across sites or among staff members, and encouraged accountability. Several grantees utilized a program coordinator across their multiple sites, which encouraged frequent discussion of implementation challenges and how to resolve them program-wide. Finally, most grantees communicated the importance of having leadership and staff who are wholeheartedly dedicated to their program's purpose and can connect with participants on a personal level. All these leadership features helped support implementation and fostered higher levels of engagement and connectedness among participants.

Cross-program collaboration provides opportunities for grantees to learn from and support each other. Information-sharing and networking among grantees with similar programming helped them learn from each other, share strategies, and support each other with program design and implementation. However, collaborative opportunities were not facilitated for all grantees involved in the AAMBTF initiative, resulting in feelings of disconnect from the larger initiative for those who did not have the opportunity to engage with other grantees. When asked about the utility of facilitating interactions or support across programs, most grantees felt this would be helpful to their progress and, ultimately, their success.

Supporting programs with technical assistance and formal evaluation aids implementation. During the evaluation period, each active grantee participated in a collaborative and iterative process with the RAND team to articulate specific goals and corresponding objectives, and to identify indicators or measures of progress for each objective. In addition, PACE (until 2011) and the RAND team provided technical assistance



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as needed to improve program implementation and increase the capacity of grantees to monitor and evaluate programs on their own. Grantees appreciated being able to develop and refine their own goals. In many cases, this technical assistance and evaluation process uncovered the need to update or modify program goals and implementation approaches to align with the overall mission and ensure successful engagement with youth. The need for ongoing support varied, with some grantees developing their own curriculum and evaluation process and others relying heavily on outside support from evaluation or technical support staff. Regardless, all grantees praised this type of support, noting that it encouraged continuous quality improvement practices and reduced measurement challenges related to aligning goals and objectives with outcomes. Having a funder that recognized the importance of flexibility and the need to integrate the evaluation process throughout the grant period (not just at the end of the funding cycle) helped foster a more successful implementation process across the AAMBTF initiative.

Culture, family, and community affect all aspects of program delivery and overall success. A consistent finding across grantees was the importance of understanding and accounting for the impact of culture, family, and community on both program delivery and the ability to "move the needle" on key program outcomes. Systemic and underlying issues (e.g., exposure to community violence, lack of coordination among the agencies and systems working with families), as well as more immediate family needs (e.g., ability to work, lack of resources, safety), negatively affect a program's ability to engage youth, family, and the community for the sort of support that ultimately influences individual-level success (e.g., improved knowledge or attitudes, school attendance, GPA). As a result, significant progress on program objectives often did not occur during a single grant period. This was particularly relevant to the AAMBTF initiative target area of education, for which the grantees had little power to change GPA, resulting in a largely unmet goal. On average, youth were graduating with GPAs below 3.0. This suggested that while some youth showed promise, others struggled with academic progress, which can lead to a host of other complex, intergenerational issues.

Many of the issues that participants, their families, communities, and even the grantees face are institutional and/or structural and cannot be addressed, much less overcome, without greater advocacy and support from entities with the power to change how institutions support impoverished, largely African-American communities.

Future Direction

Overall, the AAMBTF grantees provided programming for a broad spectrum of youth over a sustained period of time. While the grantees faced challenges in achieving all of their implementation and outcome goals, most grantees experienced success in at least one area or showed significant improvement in their implementation process.

Reflecting on lessons learned that focus on grantee performance, we make the following high-level recommendations for how funders can continue to support programs serving African-American youth and offer future directions for improving program implementation, impact, and sustainability within the AAMBTF initiative and beyond.

- Support programs' engagement in a structured implementation planning process that outlines initial goals

and objectives to help ensure programs stay on target and improve the likelihood that goals are accomplished.
- Prioritize funding programs that have established school or community connections or the capacity to cultivate strong relationships with potential referral sources to facilitate program recruitment and implementation.
- Help programs identify tailored and flexible strategies at the beginning of the process that align with existing county or community resources to address the challenges of working with the target population and increase engagement with the program.
- Select programs that have a track record in identifying and recruiting program leaders, staff, and volunteers who are committed to and exemplify the program's priorities.
- Facilitate cross-program collaboration that allows grantees to engage in peer-to-peer learning, share strategies for addressing challenges, and support each other with program design and delivery.
- Provide ongoing support for continuous quality improvement efforts regarding implementation and the likelihood of having a positive impact on participants in the program.
- Support grantees in identifying targeted, short-term, individual-level outcomes and measures that are aligned with program goals and activities to enable an assessment of the individual-level impact of the program.
- Encourage the use of core implementation models and common measures to improve cross-program comparisons and measurement of collective impact.

Recognizing these issues as important to the successful implementation of programs serving African-American youth, The Heinz Endowments incorporated many of these supports into their process of working with the AAMBTF grantees with varying degrees of success. Given this variability, it will be important to focus and tailor future support to grantee needs in order to improve program implementation, impact, and sustainability within the AAMBTF initiative and beyond.

> "One issue for these youth is the necessity to work, particularly among the low socioeconomic status population."
>
> —Quote gathered during interviews with program staff

Despite their many differences, one overriding concern loomed large for all grantees: What is the best way to work with young people who face such complex issues and obstacles in their families, communities, and culture? While there is no singular answer, funders can encourage grantees to establish realistic and short-term goals that align directly with the program elements to help them demonstrate participants' intermediate growth and change. Having these conversations with grantees at the outset, or even integrating the discussion into the proposal process, will help shape better program design and implementation. In addition, having flexible criteria within the grant (e.g., longer grant periods or tempered expectations of outcomes) is important to supporting programs like the ones funded through the AAMBTF initiative. Finally, having an open dialogue between the funder and the grantees about the challenges of working with these youth signals that the funder is supportive and open to addressing the challenges.

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About This Report

African-American youth in Pittsburgh and Allegheny County in Pennsylvania face the same challenges as many of their peers across the country, including poor employment, education, and criminal justice system outcomes. To address these obstacles, human services and community-based programs seek to capitalize on the strengths of youth while recognizing the heterogeneity and interactive nature of both positive and negative individual and environmental influences.

The project reported here, supported by The Heinz Endowments, aimed to evaluate the implementation of programs funded by The Heinz Endowment's African American Men and Boys Task Force (AAMBTF) initiative in Allegheny County and to understand how the programs operated, whether they made progress toward achieving their goals, and what can be learned from their implementation.

The evaluation began in July 2011 and ended in June 2015. The views presented here are those of the authors and not necessarily those of The Heinz Endowments, its directors, officers, or staff. We gratefully acknowledge the invaluable time, expertise, and knowledge generously contributed by the grantee's program leaders and staff who participated in this evaluation.

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