

**Preliminary Assessment of the
MBK BOSTON Mini-Grants Program:
First Steps, Next Steps**

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Preface



Since my appointment as Director of My Brother's Keeper Boston in August of 2016, our main focus has been to support the landscape of programming for young boys and men of color (YMBOC). It is imperative for us to learn from and expand successful programming that already exists, rather than try to reinvent. We have a lot of talented people in Boston with the same purpose, working on the ground every day. That is why our primary work at MBK Boston is to support a collective action agenda among those uplifting Black and Brown boys. Our success will be achieved by enhancing, partnering, and convening programming that already exist to assure a collective impact for YBMOC in our city.

Many of the City's most effective partners reaching Black and Brown boys are based in low-income neighborhoods. These are often grassroots organizations with connectivity to families and communities of color. They are key in our effort to ensure that all of our young

people are connected to real opportunities. The MBK Boston Mini grant program is designed to support, enhance, and learn from existing positive neighborhood-based programming. Together we can galvanize their power, disseminate their best practices, and increase our collective impact.

Mayor Marty J Walsh and The Boston Foundation have made MBK Boston a priority. They have provided a significant contribution to the MBK Boston Mini-Grant program. As we all agree, the City of Boston's inclusion and equity agenda can only be achieved with the support of our leadership and the participation of all residents.

This Mini-Grant program evaluation report will serve as a learning tool to execute better a whole-City approach to improving life outcomes for Black and Brown boys. Instead of a top-down approach, we are strengthening successful community-based efforts to prepare all of our young people for educational, career, and economic success.



Conan Harris
Director
My Brother's Keeper
City of Boston

With Sincere Acknowledgements to the Supporters of the MBK Mini-Grant Program:

Mayor Marty J. Walsh

Orlando Walker, The Boston Foundation

The MBK Boston Team

Liberty Mutual

Dr. James Jennings

Introduction

This report is a preliminary assessment of the first phase of the MBK BOSTON mini-grants program initiated under the auspices of the MBK BOSTON, established by Boston's Mayor Marty Walsh in 2014. Conan Harris, the Executive Director of this program, described the broad goals of MBK Boston as follows:

I: Increase the number of young men and boys of color graduating from high school ready for college and career.

II: Increase the number of young men and boys of color successfully entering the workforce.

III: Reduce youth violence and provide a second chance, with a focus on young men and boys of color.

IV. Increase the collective action and impact of the City of Boston and non-profit activities supporting young men and boys of color.”²

These goals are pursued with deliberate focus on Black and Latino boys and young men; investment in the strengthening and expanding the capacity of grassroots organizations; and emphasis on place-based strategies and coordination in neighborhoods where there are residential concentrations of Black and Latino boys and young men.

An earlier report, *Mapping Momentum*,³ documented the need for greater attention to the challenges and needs faced by young Black and Latino males, but also highlighted the critical role of neighborhood-based organizations which have direct contact with youth.⁴ This latter report proposed that this population could best be served within a context of community and

² Email correspondence with Conan Harris, May 10, 2017

³ Andrew Wolk and James Jennings, *Mapping Momentum for Boston's Youth: Programs and Opportunities for Black and Latino Young Men*, Root Cause (Spring 2016)

⁴ The phrase, *Black and Brown* young men of color, is used interchangeably with *Black and Latino* young men of color, throughout this report.

partnerships with targeted focus on Black and Latino young males. It was also proposed that such a focus is not inconsistent with an understanding and response to young women of color, as well.

The MBK BOSTON Mini-Grants initiative is relatively small in terms of total budget. It also reflects a focus on community-based approaches in its work. The mini-grant initiative emerges from public discussions with explicit attention to smaller, grassroots organizations. This is important, as noted by the MBK BOSTON director and Advisory Board members, because the smaller neighborhood organizations are in direct contact to the population being served, and have developed a body of expertise about the challenges and potential solutions in improving the lives of young people. This was partially confirmed in *Mapping Momentum*, where the co-authors discovered that while many larger nonprofits provide services to Black and Latino young males, the perspectives and experiences of people with direct contact and work with this population was sometimes missing in the delivery of services. This was reiterated as a key theme in two focus groups organized under the auspices of the *Mapping Momentum* report, and repeated at numerous community meetings associated with MBK BOSTON.

Seven questions guided the preliminary assessment of the first round of mini-grants:

- 1) what is the of range and type of activities; participants;
- 2) how are organizations utilizing grants to implement activities;
- 3) how goals and objectives are being realized;
- 4) what are initial challenges to implementation of activities;
- 5) are there any emerging lessons or accomplishments;
- 6) how is information being collected and analyzed; and,
- 7) do grantees have recommendations for future planning?

The above set of questions represented a context for the assessment's methodology.

The assessment tools included development of a taxonomy (Appendix A) the describing range and types of activities; review and content analysis of grant proposals submitted by the mini-grant recipients; select interviews conducted (by phone and email) to examine how the grants are being utilized to implement activities. The methodology also included a review of contextual reports that have some relevance to strategies for enhancing opportunities for Black and Latino young men. (See Appendix C). Interviewees were presented with questions aimed at understanding how their activities were being planned, including recruitment of target recipients; early challenges in the implementation of grants, but also any accomplishments. The evaluators were also interested in knowing about emerging lessons at this early stage of the MBK BOSTON Mini-Grants implementation. The assessment was initiated in May 2017 and completed in July 2017.

Overview of the MBK BOSTON Mini-Grants Program

As explained by the MBK BOSTON executive director at a community meeting on November 22, 2016, and held at the City Year office in Boston's South End neighborhood, the mini-grant initiative "...is designed to support local grassroots organizations and entities working to help maximize MBK BOSTON Boston's impact in improving outcomes for young men and boys of color..."⁵ Part of the strategy for this initiative is that it would have a strong neighborhood-based orientation, focusing on smaller community organizations located in parts of Boston with relatively high numbers of Black and Latino youth. The initiative was not intended to be implemented as a formal program or aimed at specific activities.

Awards can range between \$500 to \$7,000, with an average grant of \$3,500. The grants were not to be used for general operating support or technical assistance, but rather be directly linked to the young men being served under the proposed range of activities.⁶ Further, priority would be given to community-based organizations working on grassroots programs and events. The first funding cycle was targeted for December 2016 and awards ranging from \$500 to \$7,000 were made to ten organizations. Grants were announced in February 2017 when a MBK BOSTON committee selected 10 of the 27 applicants for the first round of mini-grant funding in the total amount of \$50,000 with an average award of \$5,000.⁷ A second round of awards were scheduled to be announced in July 2017. The first wave of mini-grant recipients are eligible to re-apply for grants in the second round.

The selection was based on the submission of grant applications requiring organizations to submit a project summary and narrative, timeline for implementation of activities and a corresponding budget. In addition, applicants were asked to provide a short bibliography

⁵ Email correspondence with Conan Harris, May 10, 2017.

⁶ Some organizations did request funding for salaries and operating support, however.

⁷ A list of the members and affiliations of the MBK BOSTON Advisory Board is provided in Appendix B.

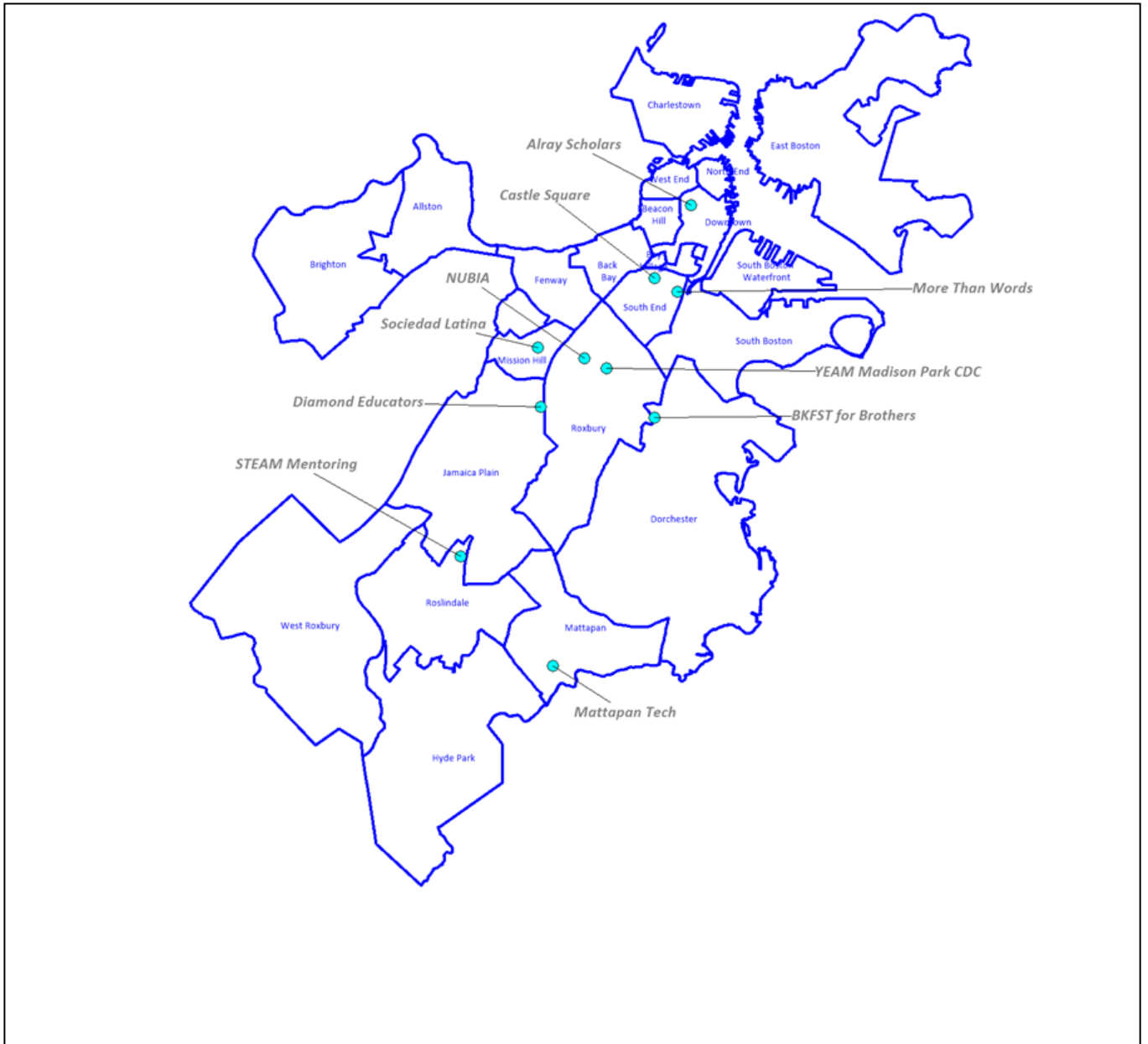
showing direct or indirect connection with the proposed activities and findings in the field of youth development or other relevant disciplines. An information session was organized soon after the announcement of grant recipients in order to explain further details about the grant, and to answer any questions on the part of the grantees.

A total of twenty-seven organizations submitted applications, and ten organizations were selected, including,

- Alray Scholars Program
- BCYF Menino Community Center
- Breakfast IV Brothers
- Castle Square Tenants Association
- IT Job Training/Mattapan Tech
- Justice Resource Institute / Diamond Educators
- Madison Park CDC (STEAM Mentoring)
- More Than Words
- NUBIA
- Sociedad Latina

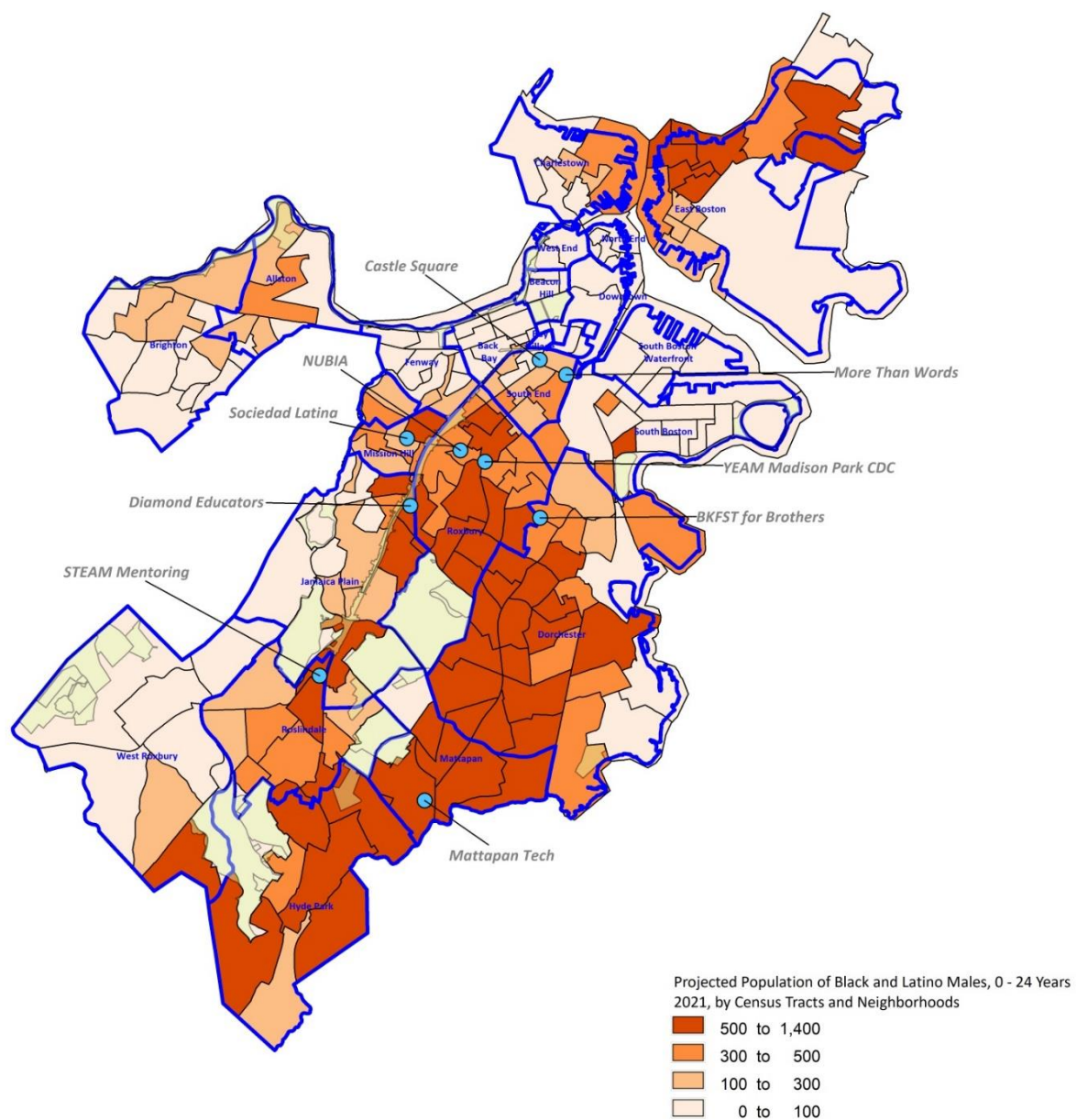
In terms of the number of youth served, two organizations serve more than 100 youth, four organizations serve between 15-35 youth, and two organization serve less than 10 youth. Not all the organizations focus specifically on young Black and Latino males but rather include this latter group within a broader reach to youth.

The following map shows the location and catchment areas of these ten organizations by Boston neighborhoods. The map shows that one mini-grant recipients is based in Dorchester; two in Roxbury; one in Mission Hill; one in Jamaica Plain; one in Roslindale; two in the South End; and, one program is based in Downtown Boston.



The next map shows the location of the first wave of MBK BOSTON Mini-Grants recipients in relation to 2021 projected population concentrations of all Black and Latino males, ages 0 to 24 years.⁸ The map shows that most, but not all, of MBK BOSTON Mini-Grant recipients were based in areas of the city with concentrations of Black and Latino males, ages 0 to 24 years of age. The map shows that areas in East Boston, Hyde Park, Dorchester, and South Boston there were concentrations of this youth population that did not record MBK BOSTON mini-grants activities. It is possible that youth from these latter areas accessed MBK Boston mini-grant activities, but this was not explored as part of the preliminary assessment.

⁸ Population projections are based on census counts and estimates prepared by Geolytics; their data is the basis for geocoding thematically population projections in Boston by census tracts.



Preliminary Assessment: Findings

This preliminary assessment is formative, focusing on the design of the initiative and initial implementation challenges rather than evaluating short, or long-range impacts of the initiative. The findings are organized first, by discussion of the range and type of activities and targeted participants; this is followed by discussion about initial implementation challenges.

This discussion serves as the basis for recommendations in the Conclusion of this report.

Range and type of activities and targeted participants: an overview

- One MBK BOSTON mini-grant recipient utilized its funds to build cross-generational dialogues in a community setting. Foods and meals represent a tool for bringing people together and discussing community issues. Some of the participants have been released recently from incarceration. All participants reside in Dorchester, Roxbury and Mattapan, but some from Brockton and Lawrence and are recruited informally through mentoring networks.
- Another mini-grant recipient reflects a strong place-based approach connecting youth with academic support and IT training and social enterprise, and the arts especially for high school students. Here, parents are also enlisted to share academic information about the youth being served; this facilitates better targeting of needed academic support. Parents are considered a critical resource for working with youth and keeping them involved with activities. Youth are also paid as interns for participation in college and career-focused workshops. In the latter, youth have latitude in exploring topics and issues which interest them.
- Mentoring is emphasized by another organization, but with an added component of training mentors. The quality of mentoring goes beyond personal commitment in that mentors should understand something about the needs of young males, but also how to connect them to available resources. This program is place-based and working with youth who live in the same housing development in Roxbury. It was suggested that this should facilitate the building of partnerships with other institutional resources.
- Involving youth in gardening is a major activity pursued by another MBK BOSTON mini-grant recipient. It was proposed that this kind of activity, designed for youth participation, can help ‘youth on the street without things to do’, and encourage

entrepreneurial and job-related skills, as well. An add-on is that youth acquire some preliminary information about agricultural science.

- One organization utilizes mentoring aimed at building self-confidence, as well as improving school grades and attendance; activities are also aimed at making youth more culturally aware about their community. The target audience for this organization are young Latino males. This organization is developing information and data that will allow youth to be supported in terms of academic and vocational aspirations and achievement. But they are also receiving wrap-around services that are beneficial not just to the young men, but their families, as well.
- Utilization of the arts, including storytelling and role-playing, and public speaking, is used by a mini-grant recipient to instill a sense of self-empowerment in youth who are identified as high risk for dropping out of school. The aim is to prepare this population in thinking and strategizing for careers.
- Introducing youth to technology through hands-on learning and internships, but accompanied with training related to soft skills, including job interview techniques, resume preparation, and presentation of self-image in one program, was linked to job access. This program works with Black and Brown youth still in school, but also some involved with the Courts. Homelessness was an issue that some of these youth experienced, or were experiencing.
- Another mini-grant recipient was more service oriented, seeking to involve a small number of youth in ongoing services. Additionally, this organization tries to connect youth to other resources in Boston, but also an IT program in one of the City's suburbs. Most of the youth served are Black and Latino, but there does not seem to be a targeted approach for reaching the population of Black and Latino young males.

These kinds of activities directly and indirectly reflect the overall mission of MBK BOSTON regarding young Black and Latino males. Additional information about other MBK BOSTON mini-grant recipients is provided in Appendix A.

Initial implementation challenges

Initial implementation challenges include planning for financial sustainability after the grant period; balancing strategies and activities with organization capacity; strategies and plans for collection of data and information; building partnerships if the organization does not have current partnership networks. More broadly, developing and articulating a clear placed-based “theory of change” is also an implementation challenge for some organizations. These challenges are further described below.

- A challenge highlighted in some of the interviews involves continual financial support in a context where nonprofits are in competition for limited funds. There was some concern regarding the sustainability of MBK BOSTON beyond the current administration, if not institutionalized within the City’s budgetary framework.
- Another challenge is organizational capacity; while these organizations are in direct connection with youth, they are limited in the assistance they can provide due to capacity issues. Related to this issue is limited staff which discourages expansion of strategies and activities that might be very positive in terms of future impacts. This challenge is especially stark with some programs that faced very high demand on the part of youth.
- A few organizations raised the issue of recruitment, some needing more time to outreach to youth. Some utilized social media; other organizations also tapped parents and schools to assist with recruitment. A related concern was that MBK BOSTON reflect a better balance of Black and Latino young males in terms of outreach to programs.
- The call for the collection and analysis of data can be surreal given the smaller size of some neighborhood-based organizations. While some funders demand the collection of hard data, some of the organizations closest to youth are best at sharing anecdotal evidence and stories. Unfortunately, the latter is de-prioritized by funders as not as ‘hard’ as numeric data. Most of the interviewees could relate powerful stories about the young men they serve, but a systematic mechanism for capturing and learning from these stories is not yet available.
- While the various initiatives did take off the ground in a timely way, it was suggested that more time for planning would have been ideal. More planning time could facilitate

greater effectiveness with outreach and recruitment of youth to participate in activities. This is also important in light of unforeseen organizational changes on the part of the recipient, but partner organizations as well.

- Work with other community partners varied since some organizations already had rich networks with other organizations. But, if these networks are not already part of the organization's infrastructure it could be difficult to pursue in a short period of time. Yet, this is important especially for some youth may have little or not so obvious ties with other organizations or nonprofits.

These challenges were faced in different degrees and varied ways by all the mini-grant recipients. But collectively the challenges represent an opportunity for further discussion and strategizing for strengthening and expanding the impacts of MBK Boston activities. This means that while the assessment pertains to the first wave of mini-grant recipients, the recommendations below may be applicable to future grant dispensations but also for the overall strategies and activities pursued under MBK BOSTON.

Conclusion and Recommendations

As noted in the Introduction the current report represents a preliminary assessment about the initial design and implementation experiences of the first wave of MBK BOSTON mini-grants recipients. Though this report's assessment is limited in its scope, we do have some recommendations that might serve to expand MBK BOSTON planning and activities and impacts. The following recommendations, not presented in any order of priority, can serve as a framework for further discussions and sharing of ideas.

1. The MBK BOSTON might consider utilizing themes in its future grant-making or organizing activities, or encouraging current and future grantees to consider thematic approaches. For example, themes such as 'entrepreneurship' or 'cultural consciousness' or "enhancing community civic involvement", or "reaching out to elders", or, 'working with other youth of color in your community', etc. might serve as ways to generate ideas aimed at empowering Black and Latino young males.

This approach could assist in refining a 'theory of change' that can help organizations to pursue, document and measure activities and future impacts more effectively. Such an approach could also serve as a bridge between MBK Boston and mini-grant recipients to engage in greater communication about expectations and provision of technical assistance through institutional partnerships.

2. MBK BOSTON should help to build and organize a base of information, stories, photos that can be shared among all MBK BOSTON mini-grant recipients as well as other sectors.
3. There should be a meeting or focus group where MBK BOSTON mini-grant recipients can share their insights and lessons learned about working with Black and Latino youth. And, there should be a similar kind of activity providing space to young males to discuss their experiences with MBK BOSTON, across race and ethnicity, but also neighborhoods. The findings of such focus groups should be shared widely with communities and the general public.
4. As applicants, the mini-grant recipients provided many bibliographic references that informs their work. We suggest a more targeted bibliography that can be shared widely

among all mini-grant recipients. This report includes an annotated bibliography of a few documents that can be useful for discussion among mini-grant recipients. (Appendix C).

5. Provide technical assistance for mini-grant recipients wishing to build stronger partnerships. This assistance could take the form of information about available resources in government and non-government sectors. Or, it could be arranged meetings between MBK BOSTON mini-grant recipients and potential institutional partners.
6. Since Boston reflects concentrations of both, young Latino and Black males, greater emphasis on place-based recruitment can be effective in ensuring that both groups are outreached to, effectively.

The above recommendations emerge from a preliminary look at the work associated with the first wave of the MBK BOSTON Mini-Grants initiative. But, these recommendations can be the basis for a more comprehensive examination and evaluation of MBK Boston's three areas of priority: improving high school graduation rates and enhancing career ready opportunities for youth; building and sustaining successful workforce experiences for youth; and, reducing youth violence. We would encourage MBK Boston, therefore, to continue to discuss the above challenges and recommendations not only in terms of the mini-grants initiative, but the broader work of MBK Boston.

Appendix A: Overview of Organizations and Youth Served

Alray Scholars Program	Provides financial and emotional support for students in college through a mentoring program, and providing financial textbook aid.
Breakfast IV Brothers: Catalyst for Change	Hosts breakfasts through which intergenerational bonds can be made within the Black community to provide each other with knowledge, experiences, and resources necessary to thrive.
Castle Square Tenants Organization: Square Roots	Youth development and paid internship program which focuses on relationship building and 21 st century skills through vocational training and art.
Justice Resource Institute: Diamond Educators	Supports youth in accessing resources, developing healthy relationships, and promoting self-empowerment through peer and group mentoring.
Madison Park CDC: Youth Empowerment & Advancement Mentoring (YEAM)	Incorporating a formal youth-sourced mentoring program to the existing workforce development program in order for youth to meet educational objectives, and build career skills.
Mattapan Tech	Promotes self-sufficiency through job training and career building in preparation for an entry level IT position, and subsequent higher education.
Menino BCYF: Boys Club/STEAM Mentoring	Teaches boys of color about robotics, computer technology, nutrition, and communication through a peer-based mentoring and training program.
More than Words	Social enterprise program which provides paid job training and case management to reach educational goals, and post-secondary employment or education options through workshops, career and education coaching.
Nubian United Benevolent International Association (NUBIA)	Supports food justice and community development through an afterschool program focused on gardening, culture and heritage, and academic/ job skill development.
Sociedad Latina: Achievers Boston	Focuses on Latino youth in high school and provides wraparound, culturally relevant support services so that young men can graduate and achieve post-secondary educational and vocational success.

Appendix B: MBK BOSTON Advisory Board Members

Thaddeus Miles, Co-Chair, Director of Community Services MassHousing

Joseph D. Feaster, Jr., Co-Chair, McKenzie & Associates PC

Mo Barbosa, Director of Community Engagement Training & Capacity Building

Health Resource In Action

Devin Edwards, Legislative Aide

William Gross, Chief - Boston Police Department

Malachi Hernandez, BA candidate, Northeastern University

Marty Martinez, Executive Director, Mass Mentoring

Dr. Makeeba McCreary, Managing Director & Sr. Advisor of External Affairs - Boston Public Schools

Joel Mora, Education Programs Manager, Hyde Square Task Force

James Morton, President & CEO YMCA of Greater Boston

Dan Mulhern, Director of The Mayor's Office of Public Safety

Edward Powell, Executive Director of STRIVE /Vice President of Programs - Justice Resource Institute

Marta Rivera, Greater Boston Latino Network

Freddie Velez, Executive Director, Youth Options Unlimited (YOU) Boston

David Wright, Executive Director, Black Ministerial Alliance

Rev. Liz Walker, Minister/The Walker Group

Appendix C: Select Annotated Bibliography

This Appendix does not represent an exhaustive list of literature and materials pertaining to working with Black and Latino young males. It is only meant as introductory for community-based organizations to obtain an initial understanding of some major issues. The bibliographic resources below may be useful for planning and guiding programs and activities related to MBK-Boston.

Mapping Momentum for Boston's Youth: Programs and Opportunities for Black and Latino Young Men

This report was published by Root Cause in Spring 2016; it provides a wealth of data relevant to the life experiences of Black and Latino young male in Boston. This research report helped to frame some of the MBK BOSTON strategies and activities. It describes the nonprofit landscape of services and strategies in terms of this population. The report also includes insights from people involved directly with this population in community settings. The report was part of the basis for the planning of the MBK mini-grants initiative and other MBK Boston activities.

<http://tiny.cc/mbkbos0>

Toward More Equitable Outcomes: A research synthesis on Out of School Time work with Boys and Young Men of Color

This article is an overview of research-based trends on practices supporting boys and young men of color in out of school time. It is authored by Jon Gilgoff, executive director of Brothers on the Rise, and Shawn Ginwright, Ph.D, associate professor of education at San Francisco State University. Prof. Ginwright has also published other pieces emphasizing the importance of smaller, community-based organizations in terms of outreach and impact of services on young males.

<http://tiny.cc/mbkbos1>

W.K. Kellogg Foundation Logic Model Development Guide

Programs which are looking to further develop their practices toward a systematic assessment of efficacy and outcomes can understand the *logit model* for doing such. This guide can help programs develop and action plan or a theory of change to rationalize their program. Examples and resources are included in this guide, and it is available for free through the Kellogg foundation website. This framework could be particularly useful in connecting a theory of change to a range of organizational activities.

<http://tiny.cc/mbkbos2>

Guide to Mentoring Boys and Young Men of Color

This guide is a collaboration of My Brother's Keeper Alliance and MENTOR: The National Mentoring Partnership. It describes recommended practices for "critical mentoring," a strengths-based and liberatory approach. It also reviews elements of effective practice for mentoring overall standards, as well as recommended practices for programs service boys and young men of color. It is available for free through the education resource information center (ERIC).

<http://tiny.cc/mbkbos3>

Culturally-Grounded Approaches to Positive Youth Development

This is a digital resource which includes 20 minute research-based presentations on supporting youth of color including topics such as: youth of color as agents of change, community initiatives supporting youth of color, civic contributions among immigrant and undocumented youth, and natural mentoring relationships among black adolescents. It is a free resources through Youth-Nex. It could be particularly useful to share with young people who are being served by community-based organizations.

<http://tiny.cc/mbkbos4>

Our Mental Health Minute

This video resource is aimed at reducing mental health stigma, providing resources for accessing and utilizing quality mental health care, and increasing mental health literacy. Topics include PTSD, abuse, drugs and alcohol, racial identity, stress, and coping. These videos are designed with a focus on the Black community by two clinical psychologists. The video also reflects some of the themes emerging from earlier focus groups sponsored under auspices of the *Mapping Momentum* report, above.

<http://tiny.cc/mbkbos5>

A National Portrait of the Health and Education of Latino Boys and Young Men

This report is designed to inform the discussion around My Brother's Keeper in order to support the well-being of Latino Youth from early childhood through young adulthood. The report identifies disparities as well as opportunities in terms of well-being indicators and risk indicators. It is published by the National Research Center on Hispanic children and Families as is available for free through ChildTrends.

<http://tiny.cc/mbkbos6>

Education Equity and Out-Of-School Learning

This infographic provides data on blocks to participation, affordability, and demand for programs at a national level. It is available for free through the Connected Learning Alliance. It can be useful in placing local programs and strategies within a broader national context.

<http://tiny.cc/mbkbos7>

Creating Paths to Employment for Opportunity Youth

This toolkit was created by the Aspen Institute, and Jobs for the Future. It is designed to support community organization, intermediaries, and employers in supporting employment for opportunity youth. It is available for free through the Jobs for the Future website.

<http://tiny.cc/mbkbos8>

The following is a list of public databases can be accessed for a range of data about youth.

ChildTrends

This is a nonprofit research organization focused on using data to inform public policy and interventions. Their reports are designed for a practitioner and policymaker audience.

www.childtrends.org

Education Resources Information Center (ERIC)

This is an education research database sponsored by the Institute of Education Sciences, U.S. Department of Education. It contains a wealth of information in the form of research reports, articles, discussion papers, and other.

<https://eric.ed.gov/>

Journal of Youth Development

This is an open source, peer-reviewed online journal focused on youth development practice and research. These materials are particularly useful for researchers, evaluators, and practitioners. It can help organizations understand the ‘state of the literature’ to a certain extent.

<https://jyd.pitt.edu>