



# MBK COMMUNITY CHALLENGE

## Playbook for Action

### **Purpose of this Playbook**

- A.** To encourage Mayors, tribal leaders and county executives to accept the President’s “MBK Community Challenge”
- B.** To provide a process framework for the development of an effective plan of action
- C.** To define the six goals central to the Challenge
- D.** To promote data-driven strategies

### **My Brother’s Keeper at a Glance**

In February 2014, President Obama launched the My Brother’s Keeper (MBK) initiative to address persistent opportunity gaps faced by boys and young men of color and ensure that all young people can reach their full potential. The initiative seeks to organize and capitalize on the commitment of community leaders in order to reach that goal.

Starting this fall, the Administration will take the next crucial step in this effort by issuing a challenge to cities, towns, counties and tribal nations across the country to become “MBK Communities.” This challenge represents a call to action for all members of our communities, and Mayors, tribal leaders, and town and county executives in particular, as they often sit at the intersection of many of the vital forces and structural components needed to enact sustainable change through policy, programs, and partnerships. In addition to issuing this challenge to Mayors and local officials, the Obama Administration has conducted outreach to business leaders, non-profits, philanthropies, and local school-systems, who are organizing independently to support communities’ efforts.

The MBK Community Challenge encourages communities (cities, rural municipalities, and tribal nations) to implement a coherent “cradle – to - college - and - career strategy” for improving the life outcomes of all young people to ensure that they can reach their full potential, regardless of who they are, where they come from, or the circumstances into which they are born.

It is important to underscore that this is not a new federal program, but rather a call-to-action, and a targeted effort to convene leaders, identify effective strategies, and to work together to accomplish our shared goal of improving life outcomes for young people. We encourage you to use this Playbook to guide your planning and outreach with the understanding that you may have already begun some of these steps. Challenge participants are encouraged to reach out with questions or ideas by emailing [localgovernment@who.eop.gov](mailto:localgovernment@who.eop.gov).

# LAY THE GROUNDWORK FOR AN MBK COMMUNITY

## ✓ **STEP #1: ACCEPT THE PRESIDENT'S CHALLENGE**

Notify the White House that you will participate ([localgovernment@who.eop.gov](mailto:localgovernment@who.eop.gov)), provide a designated point of contact on your staff, confirm your pledge to build and execute a plan to accomplish as many of the goals listed below as possible, and announce your acceptance of the challenge with a press release or media statement.

- |   |   |
|---|---|
| A. Ensure all children enter school cognitively, physically, socially and emotionally ready | D. Ensure all youth complete post-secondary education or training             |
| B. Ensure all children read at grade level by 3rd grade                                     | E. Ensure all youth out of school are employed                                |
| C. Ensure all youth graduate from high school   | F. Ensure all youth remain safe from violent crime and receive second chances |

## ✓ **STEP #2: CONVENE A "LOCAL ACTION SUMMIT" TO BUILD AN MBK COMMUNITY**

This effort will require a coalition of partners with an ownership stake in the strategy, and a sense of empowerment to help lead the effort. **Within 45 days** of accepting the President's Challenge, host a Local Action Summit with key stakeholders to assess needs and assets, determine priorities, and set concrete goals.

### **EXTERNAL PARTNERS**

- University presidents
- Job training programs
- Chambers of Commerce
- Local business owners
- Faith groups & leaders
- PTA & parent groups
- Student groups
- Youth leadership orgs
- Non-profit orgs
- Local philanthropies
- Teachers, educators
- Banks/financial orgs

### **GOV'T STAKEHOLDERS**

- School systems
- Law enforcement
- Child & Family Services
- Employment Services
- Public Health
- Public Housing
- Parks and Recreation
- State & Federal partners

## ✓ **STEP #3: CONDUCT A POLICY REVIEW & FORM RECOMMENDATIONS FOR ACTION**

Following your Local Action Summit, direct a working group of pertinent government stakeholders to scour existing local policies, programs, and practices in search of ways to introduce or expand on existing efforts to better serve the needs of the community's youth. The working group should assess the impact of both existing and proposed programs. **Within 120 days** of accepting the President's Challenge, this body should produce a report with recommendations for action on your selected areas of focus (from Step 1), standards for tracking and sharing data across public agencies and community partners, and structural recommendations for institutionalizing the effort until goals are reached.

### **SUGGESTED DATA FIELDS FOR COMMUNITY TRACKING (not exhaustive):**

- |   |   |                                |
|---|---|--------------------------------|
| - Enrollment in quality pre-K                   | - School attendance                     | - Median earnings              |
| - Children entering kindergarten ready to learn | - High school graduation rate           | - Summer employment            |
| - Adolescent births                             | - AP/IB/Dual Enrollment                 | - Arrest rate                  |
| - Low birth weight                              | - Advanced degree enrollment/completion | - Exposure to violence         |
| - Child maltreatment                            | - STEM BA enrollment/completion         | - Imprisonment/detention rate  |
| - Youth developmental screening                 | - Youth in school or working            | - Homicide rate                |
| - Reading and math achievement                  | - Labor force participation rate        | - Adolescent mortality         |
|   |   | - Youth with effective mentors |

## ✓ **STEP #4: LAUNCH A PLAN OF ACTION, NEXT STEPS & A TIMETABLE FOR REVIEW**

**Within 180 days** of accepting the President's Challenge, convene key partners to publicly launch a plan of action for accomplishing selected goals based off the results of your policy review. It should include a protocol for tracking data, benchmarks and timelines for review to ensure the transparent assessment of progress towards goals, and the open examination and retooling of ineffective strategies. Include a blueprint for resourcing your efforts which outlines plans to use or redirect existing resources, new public or private sector commitments, and specific areas where additional commitments, investment, or partnership could help your community reach its MBK goals and help potential new partners target their involvement.

# MAKING THE CASE: TOPLINE TALKING POINTS

These talking points are provided as a resource to help you discuss the MBK Community Challenge with stakeholders and citizens, and are intended to be adapted to fit the needs and priorities of your community.

- In February 2014, President Obama launched the “My Brother’s Keeper” initiative to address persistent opportunity gaps faced by boys and young men of color and ensure that all young people can reach their full potential.
- My Brother’s Keeper seeks to bring together leaders, organizations, and people in communities around the country to work to improve the life outcomes of young people in America. This is about doing what is smart for our youth, our economic future, and our entire community.
- **On September 27<sup>th</sup>, the President announced that he is inviting cities and communities around the country to join the “MBK Community Challenge”** to build and execute robust plans to ensure that all young people can achieve their full potential, no matter who they are, where they come from, or the circumstances into which they are born.
- Mayors, tribal leaders, and county executives around the country are already convening key partners in their cities, to determine their communities’ biggest priorities, to set goals, and to build comprehensive, sustainable plans to give all our youth the chances to succeed that they deserve.
- Our goals as an “MBK Community” are to ensure that:
  - ✓ All of our children enter school cognitively, physically, socially and emotionally prepared
  - ✓ All of our children read at grade level by third grade
  - ✓ All of our young people graduate from high school
  - ✓ All of our young people complete post-secondary education or training
  - ✓ All youth out of school are employed
  - ✓ All of our young people are safe from violent crime and receiving the second chances they deserve
- To meet these goals, we will join communities across the country in working to improve access to high quality early education, to close stubborn gaps in school readiness, to bolster reading support programs at all levels, and to promote “reading at home” and stronger reading cultures with parents.
- We’re also going to work with school officials and parents to reduce school suspensions and expulsions.
- We are going to initiate a public-private campaign to support mentoring programs, and actively recruit citizens to serve as mentors for our youth.
- We renew our effort to prevent violence and keep our young people safe, through targeted intervention, mediation, counseling, and multi-platform campaigns to reduce violence.
- To make sure young people have viable career paths, and the skills they need to compete in the 21<sup>st</sup> century workforce, we will engage with local businesses and others to increase summer jobs, internships, and apprenticeships for young people. We will also work with our community colleges, universities and advanced training programs to improve access and affordability.
- We are committing, as a community, to identifying and implementing policies that are proven to work; to forging action-oriented partnerships; and to closely tracking our progress and setbacks with data.
- And we commit to this task to ensure our community’s workforce can compete with the workforces of cities around the country and the world. Employers will want to set up shop here because they know we have a well prepared, diverse, and fully mobilized workforce.
- Anyone concerned with the economic future of our community, our families, our neighborhoods, or our country, should know that empowering all our youth, including boys and young men of color, is an investment in our shared future, and our collective prosperity.

# BUILD A COMPREHENSIVE PLAN

Plans for MBK Communities should take a “cradle-to-college-and-career” approach, and address as many of the 6 goals laid out in the MBK Task Force’s report as possible.

## ✓ A.) ENSURE ALL CHILDREN ENTER KINDERGARTEN PREPARED TO SUCCEED

By the age of 3, children from low-income households have heard roughly 30 million fewer words than their higher-income peers. Studies show that achievement gaps, behavioral problems, health disparities, and much more can all be dramatically affected by improving children’s access to high quality early education. The unparalleled brain development and socialization that takes place in the first few years of life mean that any investment a city makes in early education is an investment in its own long-term economic success.

## ✓ B.) GET ALL CHILDREN READING AT GRADE LEVEL BY 3rd GRADE

All children should be reading at grade level by age 8—the age at which reading to learn, and not just learning to read, becomes essential. Reading well at an early age is essential to later success in education, employment and life. When provided frequent, quality reading experiences in the home, and high-quality instruction in school, nearly every child can learn to read by the third grade.

A child’s literacy skills prior to kindergarten, as well as his or her reading skills at the conclusion of kindergarten, are highly predictive of future reading proficiency. During these critical years, reading with an adult is an especially important way to familiarize children with books and promote early awareness of written language and interest in reading.

Both school and community engagement are needed to support parents and other adult caregivers in strengthening home literacy and to provide students with broader opportunities to read with adults. Preschools and elementary schools can support all families by training parents and caregivers to use effective tutoring and joint book-reading strategies, such as listening to children read.

## ✓ C.) GRADUATE ALL STUDENTS FROM H.S. – PREPARED FOR COLLEGE & CAREER

Researchers are making progress in identifying the underpinnings of school success, including: (1) effective leaders who work with staff to implement a clear and strategic vision for school success; (2) collaborative teachers who are committed to the school, participate in professional trainings, and work to improve the school; (3) involved families who have strong relationships with school staff and support learning; (4) supportive environments where the school is safe and orderly and teachers have high expectations and are engaged with their students; and (5) ambitious instruction where classes are academically demanding and engage students.

Research from the University of Chicago has found that schools that were strong on these essentials were 10 times more likely to improve student learning gains in math and reading than schools that were weaker in these essentials. Research has also demonstrated the importance of expanded learning time in schools to open new opportunities for students to grow, providing more time for student engagement and deeper attention to academics; greater enrichment classes and activities that complement school curricula; and more time for teacher collaboration and development. Summer learning loss is a significant contributor to lowered achievement, and certain high-quality out-of-school time and summer learning programs have been found to sustain or accelerate learning and reduce incidences of violence.

## ✓ **D.) ENSURE POST-SECONDARY EDUCATION OR TRAINING OPTIONS FOR ALL**

Every American child should have a postsecondary option. Often a lack of information and/or encouragement are all that stand in our children's way as they look toward their options beyond high school. Working with school boards, educators, and partners in higher education to make accurate and empowering information more broadly accessible, especially to potential first-generation-college students is an important first step. Students should know what is expected of them in order to be competitive at the next level, they should have the support they need to perform, and they should be provided the proper context as to how a post-secondary education will likely affect their career and economic options. Encouraging, facilitating, and monitoring FAFSA completion long before the deadline, and exercises to locate and fill out post-secondary applications and scholarship forms should be incorporated in learning programs throughout high school years.

## ✓ **E.) IMPROVE ACCESS TO JOBS AND VALUABLE WORK EXPERIENCE**

A mere glimpse into a workplace or higher education setting can help youth begin envisioning themselves in fulfilling careers, and building plans to make those visions a reality. When community leaders underscore for employers the long-term workforce and economic benefits of empowering the next generation of workers, everyone wins. Investments in infrastructure, advanced manufacturing, job training and raising the minimum wage will pay dividends to the economy as a whole and improve employment prospects for all young people. Summer jobs, internships, and direct line-of-sight into local professional workplaces can provide motivation, structure, and encouragement for long-term career planning—as well as “soft skills” like punctuality, teamwork and interpersonal communication, all of which enhance job prospects.

A few specific ideas for action are: (1) Collect commitments from local businesses for summer job opportunities to cover a target percentage of youth between the ages of 16-24. (2) Reach out to public and private sector employers to urge them to develop job-shadowing and internship programs for low income youth. (3) Encourage local employers to host regular field-trips from classes and community programs from local low income areas to tour their work space and interact with staff. These can be important for children as early as elementary school.

## ✓ **F.) PREVENT YOUTH VIOLENCE AND PROVIDE SECOND CHANCES**

No one is more acutely aware than local executives of how dangerous our streets can be, particularly for boys and young men of color. Violence too often leads to communities gripped by fear and heartbreak, lost lives, and incarceration. These problems reverberate through our neighborhoods and families in countless harmful ways.

Mayors, tribal leaders and county executives have unique access to the various players who must play a part in reaching young people and implementing strategies to avert tragedy. Specifically, they can embrace models for community engagement that promote constitutional and community oriented policing as core operational philosophies and provide training on racial bias and disparities to prosecutors, defense counsel, judges, probation officers and others involved as decision makers in the criminal justice system. And they can increase the availability of diversion programs to keep youth out of the juvenile justice system; increase the use of alternatives to incarceration, especially for status and misdemeanor offenses; and enhance educational and training programming for juveniles in secure placement.

Criminal histories keep many young people from getting jobs, securing housing, attaining higher education, or qualifying for loans or credit – even when they are otherwise qualified and have paid their debt to society. Local government executives can do a great deal to facilitate more successful reentries by addressing policies that saddle juveniles and young adults with excessive fines and permanent criminal records. A more effective approach is often to strengthen a community's focus on the potential and future of juveniles who have gotten into early trouble, while actively working to implement strategies that have proven to lower the likelihood of re-offense. This could include, for example, working with public housing authorities to reduce barriers for formerly-incarcerated individuals to obtain stable housing. Several communities are also exploring initiatives to modify requirements for the disclosure of juvenile or criminal records on job applications.

## ✓ **ADDITIONAL IMPERATIVE: ISSUE A CALL TO ACTION FOR MENTORS**

Access to a healthy and engaged mentor can make a world of difference in a young person's life. Mayors, tribal leaders, and town and county executives' voices will be critically important in encouraging their citizens to step up as mentors, while working with public and private sector partners to create effective mentorship programs. Several Mayors are leading by example in their cities by providing all municipal employees, from high ranking city officials to custodial staff, with mentorship training, access to matching programs, and paid time each week to dedicate toward mentorship.

## **SHARE YOUR FINDINGS**

Possibly the most important component of this Challenge is the sharing of best practices, dead-ends, and promising ideas between government officials and their partners. No one who is committed to this work should be working in a vacuum anymore. The MBK Community Challenge provides a venue, and an organizing principle for communities like yours to facilitate the sharing of information and successful strategies to ensure that no current or future leader feels that he or she needs to reinvent the wheel in attempting to address the same problems that other leaders across town or across the country have already found success in solving.

As part of your plan, incorporate a reporting structure that will facilitate the sharing of data, policy techniques, and program strategies between cities. As your work continues, adopt "What Works First" policies requiring budget directors and program managers to compare existing and proposed programs to the programs with the strongest available evidence of impact, and require a justification if a low-evidence approach is selected.

## **CONCLUSION**

In order to maximize the effectiveness of MBK Community Challenge plans, our hope is that you will approach this effort with an eye both toward short-term priorities and long-term progress. In constructing and carrying out plans, we hope community leaders will keep sustainability top of mind, and work to ensure they are answering questions with their plan as to how to keep their effort focused and effective for as long as it takes to be successful. For instance: How will you ensure your plan stays fresh and relevant over time? How will you ensure a sustained focus on eliminating disparities and obstacles to opportunity? What types of protocols will you put in place to ensure that once goals are met and problems are effectively solved, your plan can adapt to focus on sustaining the progress, or identifying new problems to solve? Build into your plan guidelines for how your community will recognize success, and move forward from there.

The President has issued this call to action at a time when our economy is growing, jobs are being created, and the global marketplace is expanding. But along with these changes come a rapidly advancing global marketplace for workers, a shrinking need for unskilled labor, and growing disparities between the rich and the poor. As a country, we simply can't afford to let any of our young people slip through the cracks.