The African American Agenda: A Path to Transformative Change

African American Leadership Forum

Our voices. Our future.
The Twin Cities African American Leadership Forum is a movement of African American leaders committed to bringing positive change to the Twin Cities African American community. The African American Agenda is a collaborative effort of the AALF and its strategic consultants. It reflects the time, energy, and contributions of many people.

Drawing upon two years of dedicated work by the AALF, Cherie Collins, Angela Stanley, and Christy Rogers were instrumental in conceptualizing and developing this document. We thank Trista Harris and David Nicholson for their guidance, dedication, and support throughout this process. We thank Yvonne Cheek, Betty Emarita and James Trice, AALF Consultants, who diligently worked with the AALF steering committee and work groups to move the African American Agenda forward. We acknowledge the AALF steering committee members and work group co-chairs listed individually on the back cover for their keen insights and leadership. We thank John powell for his insightful framing of the challenges facing communities of color and his focus on the collaborative work needed to move transformative solutions forward. We thank Gary Cunningham and Dr. Joseph White for their thoughtful leadership and continued support. We thank the Northwest Area Foundation for funding this important work.

While this document is a working draft that may change as we collectively determine the best ways to meet the needs of the Twin Cities African American community, it reflects the direction, energy, and confidence we have for creating positive, transformative change in the Twin Cities.

LEAD CONTRIBUTORS

Cherie Collins, Lead Consultant, Regional AALF
Angela Stanley, Research Associate, Kirwan Institute
Christy Rogers, Senior Researcher, Kirwan Institute

Graphic design by Craig Ratchford

KEY PARTNERS

Northwest Area Foundation  www.nwaf.org
Twin Cities African American Leadership Forum  www.aalf-tc.org
Headwaters Foundation for Justice  www.headwatersfoundation.org
Kirwan Institute for the Study of Race and Ethnicity  www.kirwaninstitute.org
Vision to Transform the Status Quo: “What if?”

What if the African American community harnessed its full potential?

What if we were the ones to lead humanity to wholeness, health, and sustainability?

What if we became the author of our own story and an agent of community healing?

What if African American leaders united and became a catalyst for a new beginning in the Twin Cities’ African American community?

What if we managed to tip a vision into a movement that became so successful that our great grandchildren took our work for granted?

It is this visionary thinking that is at the heart of the African American Leadership Forum (AALF).

Changing the Status Quo: The African American Leadership Forum

People of color, particularly African Americans, are often isolated from access to the critical resources we all need to create healthy, thriving communities, families, and individuals. This can mean a lack of high-quality educational opportunities, stable housing, sustainable employment, preventative healthcare, healthy food, safe environments, political empowerment, and wealth- and asset-building. Furthermore, as leaders we often find ourselves working in silos, offering transactional solutions (i.e., navigating what already exists with programmatic responses) to issues that require systemic change for resolution.

This isolation, both in opportunity and leadership, presents an urgent need to do something different—to challenge the status quo. We need to shift our current paradigm to one that creates opportunities and prosperity for all African American people and brings African American leaders together to work in new and transformative ways.

The AALF is a movement of African American leaders and stewards across four metropolitan areas—the Twin Cities, Portland, Seattle, and Des Moines—that is committed to the revitalization and sustainability of a vibrant African American community. We are united in the belief that we can do more together than separately. We recognize that in order to achieve enduring, positive change in our communities we need a truly transformative agenda—one that is exciting and fresh, one that challenges the status quo and changes the game. We need an agenda that

- moves us beyond silos and fragmentation,
- demonstrates the interconnectedness of people, issues, and actions, and
- changes the structures, institutions, and systems that disproportionately harm African Americans.

We need an agenda that will not produce just more of the same.
The AALF’s Transformative Agenda Framework

Opportunity and access are critical in creating a healthy, thriving community. However, historical and recent trends have taught us that the opportunities available to us can depend on who you are and where you live. To create prosperity for all African American people, we must recognize that the opportunity challenges we face as a community impacts all people. We must see the health of African American individuals, families, institutions and the community as a whole, as intricately linked (the conceptual framework for a transformative agenda is illustrated by Visual 1).

By working across silos, networks, levels, and intergenerational boundaries, we seek to broaden the landscape of opportunity for African Americans. We support goals that benefit everyone, yet we craft solutions with the strengths, needs and challenges of the Twin Cities’ African American community in mind. We support transformative action at all levels, and across all domains, through three drivers of transformative change: convene, collaborate, and champion.

TWIN CITIES AFRICAN AMERICAN LEADERSHIP FORUM: GOALS, STRATEGIES, FOCUS AREAS & DRIVERS

UNIVERSAL GOAL:
To build a just and healthy society that works equally well for everyone

TARGETED GOAL:
To become a vital African American community that uplifts the broader community

TARGETED STRATEGIES

- To maximize the potential of African American children and adults
- To reclaim and amplify the vital role of family, culture and spirituality in the African American community
- To alter the socioeconomic trajectory of the African American community
- To strengthen African American centered institutions
- To challenge and change systems that disproportionately harm African Americans

AREAS OF FOCUS
Economic development; education and lifelong learning; family, culture and spirituality; health and wellness

DRIVERS OF TRANSFORMATIVE CHANGE

Convene
- Create engagement opportunities to drive focus, change and accountability
- Convene our social capital with the motivation and intention to transform

Collaborate
- Intentionally build the infrastructure of our communities and institutions
- Intentionally build multicultural coalitions to strengthen our collective voice and relational social capital

Champion
- Advocate for policy initiatives that challenge injustice and advance our mission and goals
- Advance our worldview by influencing the influencers and becoming the influencers
The TC-AALF will work to:

Become a vital and healthy African American community that uplifts the broader community

BUILD A HEALTHY AND JUST SOCIETY THAT WORKS WELL FOR EVERYONE

HOW WILL WE DO THIS?

Develop a transformative agenda

Develop TARGETED ACTIONS that “Pass the Transformative Change Test”

Drive the Actions: CONVENE, COLLABORATE, CHAMPION!

Monitor and Evaluate those Actions: Are We Reaching Our Goals?
The AALF’s Transformative Agenda: Moving from Silos to Collective Action

Transformative change is about “flipping the script.” We have to restructure the current system, so that success builds on success. Transformative change is about working across all levels and domains, with a sustained focus on high-impact systems interventions. We must move from working in our individual silos, on transactional changes, to working within a transformative cluster of actions that are leveraged to expand opportunity for all.

Visual 2 shows how the AALF has devised strategies to address the four areas of focus: Health & Wellness, Education & Lifelong Learning, Family Culture & Spirituality, and Economic Development. Visual 2 also illustrates how various drivers are utilized in each area of focus. The Visual underscores the thoroughness of the forum’s work and lifts up concrete, doable strategies.

However, the key transformative aspects of the AALF work are not fully realized in Visual 2, but in Visual 3. Visual 3 groups the individual domain strategies into transformative clusters of related work, revealing the underlying conceptual shifts that drive a truly transformative agenda.

Visual 3 demonstrates how to leverage the strength of individual strategies by rolling them into strategic clusters. The whole of the cluster (rethinking economic inclusion, for example) is more than the sum of its parts.

We recently saw the success of a strategic cluster approach in Portland. Civil rights and fair housing organizations, including Portland AALF participants and other coalitions of color, advocated for their inclusion in a regional comprehensive planning process at the outset. They assured that they were not an afterthought in the planning process—i.e. simply asked to review pieces of the plan at the end when few significant changes can be made. They succeeded, and as a result, stakeholders in the Portland region drafted a Declaration of Cooperation—“a public commitment to think and lead in new ways and to work in new partnerships, with equity as a core goal, to develop consensus-based strategies that address the needs of the region as a whole…and to collaborate with other consortium members in promoting the successful implementation of the agreed-upon strategies.”

Now that the planning process includes communities of color at the outset (changing systems and institutions), the process of creating a new vision for the region can begin at dinner tables, community centers, and leadership events across the region. The Twin Cities AALF is already seeing the benefits of this new model as economic development leaders are engaging at various levels of regional planning early in the process.

This is only one example. The interrelatedness—the transformative potential—of multiple AALF areas of focus becomes clear in Visual 3.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>HEALTH &amp; WELLNESS</th>
<th>STRATEGY 1: Maximize the potential of African American children and adults</th>
<th>STRATEGY 2: Reclaim and amplify the vital role of family, culture and spirituality in the African American community</th>
<th>STRATEGY 3: Alter the socioeconomic trajectory of the African American community</th>
<th>STRATEGY 4: Strengthen African American-centered institutions</th>
<th>STRATEGY 5: Challenge and change systems that disproportionately harm African Americans</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Work with churches and clinics to increase healthy practices; Lift up and promote best practices for healthy activities.</td>
<td>Increase the number of community activities that are active, fun, and family focused.</td>
<td>Increase African American involvement and success in health care careers.</td>
<td>Use networks and organizations to promote a wellness (vs. “sick-care”) model.</td>
<td>Increase support for mental health services for African Americans.</td>
<td>Collect and use data relevant to African-Americans in health care (i.e., culturally conscious mental and physical health research at university level).</td>
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<tr>
<td>Health &amp; Wellness</td>
<td>Adopt and implement the Affordable Health Care Act within the African American community.</td>
<td>African American cultural practitioners name and claim best practices for individual, family, and community health.</td>
<td>Reduce environmental exposure to health risks and youth violence.</td>
<td>Bring together researchers on health disparities, community health, and environment.</td>
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<td>Empower parents to make schools welcoming, supportive, rigorous.</td>
<td>High expectations and focus on results improves learning for all African American children.</td>
<td>Expand the school day and calendar year; increase effectiveness of time spent in classroom.</td>
<td>Put best teachers in the schools where they are most needed. Develop academic leaders and mentors.</td>
<td>Formal and informal financial literacy courses.</td>
<td>Improved media literacy and participation.</td>
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<tr>
<td>VISUAL 2</td>
<td>STRATEGY 1: Maximize the potential of African American children and adults</td>
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<td>CULTURE &amp; SPIRITUALITY</td>
<td>Celebrate and promote civil discourse; socialization; manners; respect; generosity. Convene an advisory group of community stewards to keep us connected to challenges and solutions on the ground.</td>
<td>Campaign for choices that promote responsibility, personal wellness, and changing cultural norms. Engage the community in naming and claiming cultural principles and practices and how they are transmitted.</td>
<td>Champion the ability of effective, culturally centered organizations to collectively tell their stores through data so they can be competitive in an evidence-based environment.</td>
<td>Promote positive elements of African American culture as fundamental to individual and community success; i.e., the “Black Paper.” Describe and champion the validity of AALF effective and culturally centered organizational processes so that African American organizations and institutions will be able to receive culturally appropriate technical assistance.</td>
<td>Create a research-based framework for championing new methodologies and concepts to redesign systems for a pluralistic society in which African Americans are an integral part (i.e., MN Early Childhood Unified Data System).</td>
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<td>ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT</td>
<td>Promote the development of accountable financial institutions by and for the African American community.</td>
<td>Ensure that African Americans benefits from community development (i.e., metro transit).</td>
<td>Use private sector leadership to stimulate African-American economic sustainability.</td>
<td>Increase African-Americans in public service (appointed and elected).</td>
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<td>Promote integrated solutions to ensure the creation and transference of wealth from one generation to the next.</td>
<td>Amplify investment in African American neighborhoods by owning housing, buying locally, etc.</td>
<td>Host a business fair to showcase emerging sectors and network businesses and suppliers.</td>
<td>Connect to sustainable communities and community transformation regional planning and funding opportunities.</td>
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**STRATEGY 1: INDIVIDUALS**

Ensure meaningful, quality, and accessible out-of-school opportunities. Parents and children learn together, formally and informally. Increase family training and support for early education. Expand statewide Parent Aware Rating System; improve parental awareness of expectations. Empower parents to make schools welcoming, supportive, rigorous. High expectations and focus on results learning for all African American children. Expand the school day and calendar year; increase effectiveness of time spent in classroom.

Promote high quality early childhood education for every African American child. Celebrate and promote civil discourse; socialization; manners; respect; generosity. Campaign for choices that promote responsibility, personal wellness, and changing cultural norms. Develop AALF – University of Minnesota intern initiative. Follow up on STRIVE meeting. Reclaim culture & spirituality as centerpiece of family life.

**STRATEGY 2: FAMILIES**

This family, culture & spirituality cluster is about using communities, institutions, and relationships to change cultural expectations, improve self-care and community care, and reengage spirituality. It is related to, and helps drive, the “flipping the script” on wellness and education too! It feeds from this level into community awareness of positive results; the Black Paper, which then feeds into an affirmative agenda with real strategies and targets (i.e., the Office of Early Childhood, etc.).

**STRATEGY 3: COMMUNITY**

This education cluster is also about profoundly “flipping the script” at a higher level – re-thinking how, who, and why we educate. It is about a new way of educating, preparing, working with, placing, supporting, and evaluating teachers to get results for all children. It is about collecting and using relevant data and practices for the African American community; it parallels the transformative health work. Note that “flipping the script” then informs the advocacy work as does the family, culture and spirituality actions at the community level.

“Success breeds success” – transformative efforts in one domain can easily spill over into others; i.e., community economic growth and pride can support healthier individual decision making.

Again, flipping the script: This Economic Development cluster offers solutions that promote the creation and transference of wealth: targeted economic inclusion; a meaningful place at the table w/r/t federal funding and community development; transformation; visibility at business fairs; accountable financial institutions!

**STRATEGY 4: INSTITUTIONS**

Increase African American involvement and success in health care careers. Use networks and organizations to promote a wellness (vs. “sick-care”) model. Increase support for mental health services for African Americans. Collect and use data relevant to African-Americans in health care (i.e., culturally conscious mental and physical health research at university level). Reduce environmental exposure to health risks and youth violence. Bring together researchers on health disparities, community health, and environment. African American cultural practitioners name and claim best practices for individual, family, and community life.

Meet with Teachers Union around common goals. Improve professional development for educators across cultural competencies. Put best teachers in the schools where they are most needed. Develop academic leaders and mentors. Teacher support and review; three-year rolling tenure; alternative licensure; teaching teams; statewide teaching & principal evaluations.

**STRATEGY 5: SYSTEMS**

Support African American academics to do culturally-centered research. Collect and use data relevant to African-Americans in education (i.e., MN Early Childhood Unified Data System). Put best teachers in the schools where they are most needed. Develop academic leaders and mentors. Teacher support and review; three-year rolling tenure; alternative licensure; teaching teams; statewide teaching & principal evaluations.

Amplify investment in African American neighborhoods by owning housing, buying locally, etc. Enforce set-asides in construction projects. Set 2011-2012 Advocacy Agenda, i.e., Create State Cabinet-level Office of Early Childhood; Advocate for MN Conn. Adopt and implement the Affordable Health Care Act within the African American community. Ensure that laws, policies, and practices are accessible to and support positive African American outcomes. Increase African-Americans in public service (appointed and elected) – VOICES AT THE TABLE DRIVE OPPORTUNITIES TOO.

Celebrate and publicize achievements of African American students and schools across the Twin Cities. Promote positive elements of African American culture as fundamental to individual and community success; i.e., the “Black Paper.” Lift up promising and best practices that are culturally relevant to African Americans. Increase support for mental health services for African American outcomes. Enhance African-American participation in public service (appointed and elected) – VOICES AT THE TABLE DRIVE OPPORTUNITIES TOO.

Connect to Sustainable Communities and Community Transformation Regional Planning and Funding Opportunities. Promote the development of accountable financial institutions by and for the African American community. Enforce set-asides in construction projects.
The AALF’s Transformative Agenda in Action

Build a Movement at All Levels

In practice, how the priorities of a transformative agenda are implemented will differ based on who the actor is.

As an individual or a family, working for change may mean volunteering for organizations that strengthen the African American community and taking a hands-on approach to maximizing the potential of African American children and adults. It could also mean intentionally supporting African American owned businesses, taking steps toward a healthier lifestyle, developing better relationships with teachers, or running for public office.

Healthy individuals and families are the basis of healthy, vibrant communities. Communities, in turn, can strengthen individuals and families. That could mean supporting existing community-based organizations and institutions; increasing awareness around key health, education, financial, and policy issues that impact the community; or creating opportunities that might foster a stronger sense of cohesion among residents. Communities also have the opportunity to network and build relationships with other communities as ways of discovering new allies.

Organizations and institutions can support the goals and priorities of the forum in ways that individuals, families, and communities typically cannot. Organizations and institutions could earmark funds for specific community causes. They could sponsor and support leadership and educational opportunities for community members. They could create communities of opportunity through thoughtful community development and targeted neighborhood revitalization investments.

The public policy sphere is often considered the place where the most substantive change can happen. While important interventions can happen at every level, many of the long-range, large-scale interventions often take place here. Communities, institutions, or organizations could keep score cards for elected officials to rate their performance. Advocating for polices that would positively impact the African American community is also key.

Adapt and Monitor the Agenda

A transformative agenda is big picture: it is adaptable and long-lasting. As the country, the region, and the African American community changes, so will the priorities of the agenda. The transformative actions we create and prioritize year to year must:

- be strategically connected to our targeted universal approach,
- make the best use of our drivers—convene, collaborate, champion, and
- be implemented at individual, family, community, institutional, and policy levels.

We must ask ourselves: Is what we are creating truly part of a transformative agenda? If the answer is yes, then we have begun an enduring movement that will catalyze positive change for years to come.
CONVENE

CHAMPION

COLLABORATE
AALF STEERING COMMITTEE

Martin Adams, Coordinator, FIPSE Programs, University of Minnesota
Rev. Alfred Babington-Johnson, President, Stairstep Foundation
Rod Brown, Vice President of Family Services, Lutheran Social Services (Economic Co-Chair)
Ellis Bullock, Executive Director, Grotto Foundation
Toni Carter, Commissioner, Ramsey County (Health & Wellness Co-chair)
Gary Cunningham, Vice President of Programs, Northwest Area Foundation
Rev. Andre Dukes, Assistant Pastor at Shiloh Temple International Ministries and Director of Engagement at Northside Achievement Zone
Jeremiah Ellis, Special Initiatives Coordinator, YWCA St. Paul
Readus Fletcher, Deputy Director, St. Paul Department of Human Rights and Equal Economic Opportunity (Economic Co-Chair)
Gevonee Ford, Executive Director, Network for the Dev. of Children of African Descent (NdCAD)
Dorii Gbolo, CEO, Open Cities Health Center, Inc. (Health & Wellness Co-Chair)
Morris Goodwin, Vice President of Finance and Administration, Wilder Foundation (Economic Co-Chair)
Sandy Harris, Director of Diversity, Inclusion & Talent Acquisition, Medtronic
Trista Harris, Executive Director, Headwaters Foundation
Jeffrey Hassan, Attorney (Education Co-Chair)
Paula Haywood, Regional Area Manager, Hennepin County (Family, Culture & Spirituality Co-Chair)
Robert Jones, Sr. Vice President, Systems and Administration, University of Minnesota (Education Co-Chair)
Karen Kelley-Ariwoola, Vice President, Community Philanthropy, The Minneapolis Foundation
Repa Mekha, President, Nexus Community Partners (Family, Culture & Spirituality Co-Chair)
Kim Nelson, Sr. Vice President, External Relations, General Mills (Education Co-Chair)
David Nicholson, Program Director, Headwaters Foundation
Joyce Norals, Chief Human Resource Officer, Lutheran Social Services (Economic Co-Chair)
Verna Price, President, Girls In Action
Aasim Shabazz, President, KORE Strategic Design
Paul Williams, Deputy Mayor, City of St. Paul (Family, Culture & Spirituality Co-Chair)
What if we were to reclaim our youth?

What if we embraced our own cultural health and wellness?

What if we embraced and articulated the vision of our priceless values, of our intrinsic selves, without comparison of being “less than”?

What if we left a legacy for our children’s children?

What if our approach grew and sustained leadership and we were able to hold a 50th anniversary celebration?

What if our work became as familiar as cornbread and as essential as air?

African American Leadership Forum
c/o Headwaters Foundation for Justice
2801 21st Avenue South
Suite 132B
Minneapolis, MN 55407

CONVENE
CHAMPION
COLLABORATE