

**POLICYBRIDGE**  
2004-2014 COMPILATION REPORT



## Mission

PolicyBridge is an African-American led, nonpartisan, 501 (c) 3, research and advocacy public policy think tank headquartered in Cleveland, Ohio. Its aims are to research, analyze and respond to public policy issues from a minority perspective. For more information on PolicyBridge, visit [www.policybridgeneo.org](http://www.policybridgeneo.org). PolicyBridge's mission is: To create and sustain high-quality discourse addressing public policy issues affecting African-American and other underserved communities enlightening community members and catalyzing action.

# 10 Years

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As PolicyBridge celebrates the milestone of its 10th anniversary, it is an apt time to consider the progress that has been made in Northeast Ohio when it comes to issues that are critical to our minority population.

It also is an occasion to examine where things have remained stagnant, or worse, deteriorated – and to scrutinize those places where there has been upward momentum, so that we capitalize on for small victories, and turn them into large ones.

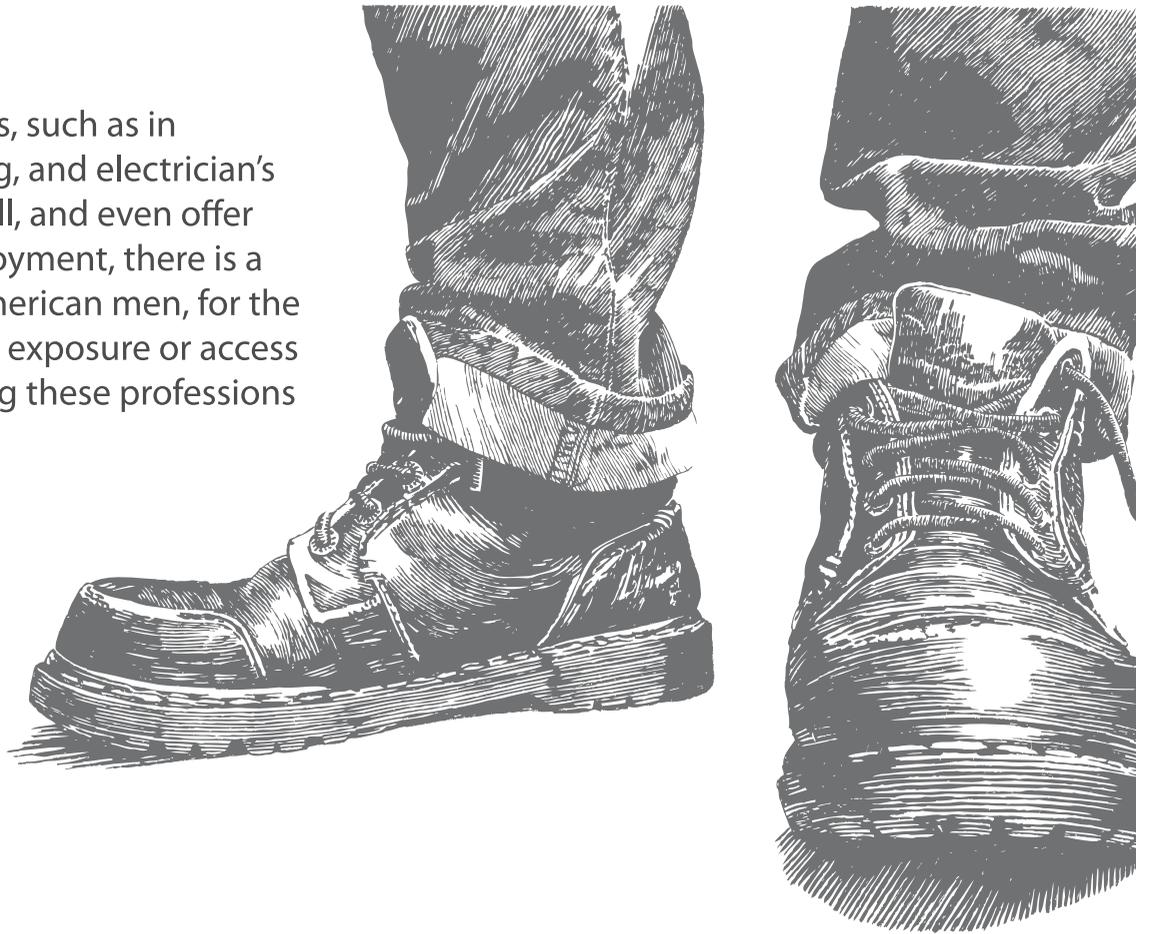
At PolicyBridge – we are often referred to as a Cleveland “think tank” – our reason for being is to get past clichés, perceptions and persistent yet often erroneous beliefs, and quantitatively and qualitatively determine what is happening to the region’s minority population.

We know that this population has grown dramatically in size and proportion, and will continue to do so. Yet progress for this population has, in several significant sectors, remained an elusive goal.

Here, we take a closer look at the reasons behind that. We also consider the successes that we are pleased to report have been achieved, and how they might be replicated.



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## Economic Development

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One thing remains abundantly clear – no single resource in Northeast Ohio is as underutilized as its population of African-American men. Consider this: 65 percent of these men live in poverty. That is an astounding statistic.

So is another - the fact that one-third of African-American men who live here never completed high school. This is not just a loss for them, though it certainly is that. But the resulting loss of income to these men, and to the families their income would support, is also crippling to our regional and state economy.

Alarmingly, this also leads to a toxic viewpoint on the part of the larger community: That these men are in fact a drain on the community's resources. The loss of potential for these men themselves, and for the greater community? That is largely not even considered.

But it should be. And that loss of potential has two crucial components: one is that a pervasive state of low expectations exists inside and outside the minority community. The other is that there is a huge vacuum of the kind of opportunities that would turn this around.

Let us take a look at some of the specifics behind this crippling malaise. One, as most well know, is that our region has suffered greatly in recent decades from a loss of blue-collar jobs – the kind that once allowed people who might not even have been high school graduates (especially in the case of immigrants) – to support a family. Such jobs once were abundant, and the loyalty of both employers and their workforce allowed for a lifelong working-class, if not middle-class, lifestyle.

Today, such jobs are for all practical purposes extinct. The result? Crushing joblessness felt most keenly by the minority community.

One thing remains abundantly clear – no single resource in Northeast Ohio is as underutilized as its When jobs exist, they are generally in the service sector – and almost always they are low-end jobs that pay minimum wage. With today’s cost of living, and the fact that these wages have not kept pace, this means they are no longer sufficient to live on, let alone raise a family on, even if two members of the household are being paid for full-time work. Gone are the days when one adult, with a working-class job, could afford mortgage payments on a family home, as was common in the 1950s and 1960s. Such an economic equation is history, and a scenario that would hardly be possible today.

There is also an apparent lack of opportunity in another sector that once provided job security for many workers – the trades. While jobs in the trades, such as in construction, plumbing, and electrician’s work, still pay fairly well, and even offer some security in employment, there is a critical gap: African-American men, for the most part, do not have exposure or access to the intensive training these professions require.

There is a disconnect between those who need the training – and who need at least a high school education to be eligible for it – and the unions who offer placement for workers who have instruction and apprenticeships under their belts.

What does this mean? In the simplest terms, African-American men are cut off from what was, and still is for some, the American dream of providing for a family, and becoming financially better off than one’s parents were. When this population of men is unemployed and underemployed – in part because of a lack of educational attainment – there is a practical loss to the community too, in economic terms.

This is the loss of consumer buying power. Consider that in the post-World War II years, when America’s factories thrummed with labor, it was the working and middle classes’ ability to be consumers that allowed a circle of prosperity to stay unbroken.

Today, that is not the case. With such dramatic numbers of African-American men not being able to make a decent and consistent living, the ripple effect is also felt in the commensurate lack of consumption, and this keeps the Northeast Ohio region lagging economically. Not unless diversity and inclusion become practices instead of merely words used in slogans, and we tap into the potential we are missing out on, will Cleveland and the region surrounding it become more competitive in the world economy.

In the meantime, there is another issue that can put us at a disadvantage – immigration. Or at least the fact that a majority of U.S. citizens are opposed to immigration. Yet Cleveland, once the fifth largest city the country, was built by the presence, and on the backs, of immigrant labor.

Now, as our city dramatically shrinks decade by decade – from more than 1 million in its heyday to under 400,000 in the most recent census figures - we also are losing not only our political clout, but our economic vibrancy. It was immigration that made us an industrial engine in the past. And while the days of that kind of industry (heavy on the manufacturing, and in the steel and iron ore sectors) are long gone, there are strong indications that immigration will have to be our salvation again in the new and different industries that will drive 21st century Cleveland – and America.

First, though, the record needs to be set straight. Research has repeatedly shown that the belief that immigrants “cost” more (in terms of public assistance and government support) than they contribute is false. In fact, immigrant labor – of any kind, even ‘off the books,’ provides what is known as a price-reducing effect on the U.S. economy.

As many well know, immigrants, legal or not, are willing to do the back-breaking, low-paid work that most Americans are not – whether it is harvesting vegetables in California, or working in Lake County to harvest grapes or work in nurseries. Immigrants are willing to take low-level jobs – cleaning office buildings at night, for example – that many people don’t want, but which to those new to our country represent the first rung on the economic ladder.

## Economic Development Cont.

Because they are willing to work cheaply, and usually without benefits, these immigrants are employable. They keep wages low – which can certainly be a negative for them personally, but also a positive, as it allows employers to hire more workers. Those workers then become a crucial cog in the local economy. In fact, anti-immigration political slogans to the contrary, the tax revenue that our government takes in from immigrants exceeds the cost of government services that immigrants need.

These immigrants – whether they work in a family restaurant, or as an engineer – become not only consumers of goods and services themselves, but often entrepreneurs, and yes, taxpayers. As ever, they bring skills and intellect that our region and society need – whether it is as engineers, computer programmers, physicians or entrepreneurs.

They increase our competitiveness as a region and nation, they help create jobs, and – most important in the shrinking “Rust Belt,” they create population growth. In past decades, strong immigrant enclaves in Greater Cleveland have been created by an influx of Asian Indian, Chinese, Russian and Vietnamese immigrants, to name just a few groups.

To put it in raw numbers, immigrants have accounted for an astounding 72 percent of Ohio’s population growth.

We can’t take such growth for granted though – we need policies and practices that will allow for aggressive recruitment, and retention, to keep both highly-skilled and low-skilled immigrants, upon whom our economic growth will rely.

Still, there are many problems immigration does not solve, and one that it actually puts in sharp, negative relief is the underperformance of African-American and Latino men in the fields of technology. Startlingly few of these men participate, let alone create, new business or jobs in the growing technology sector in Northeast Ohio. African-American and Latino men combined account for less than 10 percent of the workers in high-technology industries in Northeast Ohio, compared to the 16 percent of the technology workforce they comprise nationally.

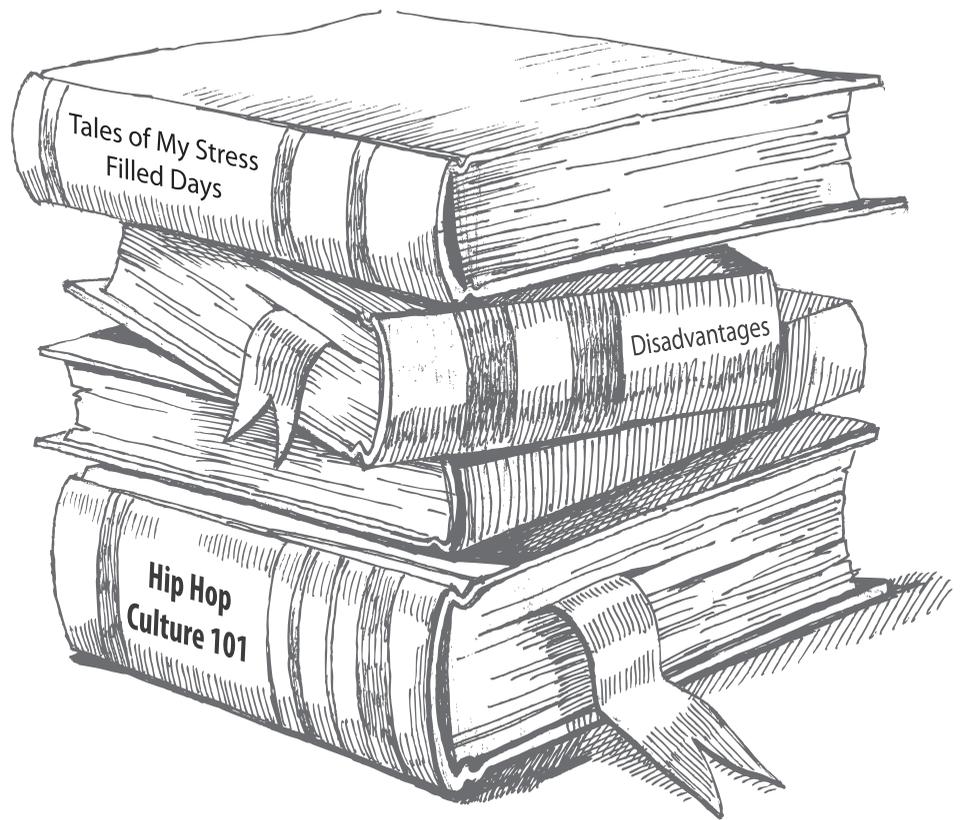
Even worse, the men in these two populations own only 2 percent of all business in technology growth industries in Northeast Ohio and Ohio. Why? One reason is that these populations reported significant obstacles when it comes to accessing start-up capital or business development support. Without that, it is nearly impossible to get a foothold as an entrepreneur or business owner – and that means not only an opportunity cost for the prospective owner, but for all those future employees he or she might have hired.

Adding to this dismaying statistic is another ongoing issue – the fact that many African-American and Latino men are never guided or encouraged to achieve educational attainment in the fields known by the acronym S.T.E.M.: science, technology, engineering and math.

This is a situation that will not change without urgent action – the kind that requires collaboration and concentrated effort by economic development organizations, in numbers that can be measured. EDOs, as they are referred to, have shown in the past what they can accomplish, as seen when they worked together to make our region more economically competitive in areas such as bio-technology.

Now it is time to specifically focus on the nurturing and encouraging interest in technology – and even technological entrepreneurship in the region’s minority communities. Until such EDOs reach out to minority workers and entrepreneurs and develop intermediaries who will help create the kinds of connections that business relies on, the progress that is long overdue will not occur.

Changing the lives of urban African-American students takes effort, time and attention – and the anti-education messages in hip-hop and broader urban culture are the enemies of such progress.



## Education

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But Northeast Ohio’s minority population cannot just rely on the outreach of EDOs. There is a deep foundational issue that must also be addressed, and that is education.

We have already noted the woeful percentage of high school graduates in this population. And certainly, there are many well-documented causes for a lack of educational attainment by minority youth.

But there is a cultural issue that also needs to be addressed – and that is the anti-education messages inside the community that have a hugely negative effect on African-American boys. To put it plainly, low expectations for their educational success are pervasive, and a distinct feature in the achievement gap between minority and white youth. Studies have repeatedly shown that when expectations are low for academic accomplishment, young men will fulfill that prophecy.

They often face a negative attitude toward academic achievement inside and outside the community, and it puts young African-American males at a huge disadvantage. As a result, too many African-American boys early on remove themselves from the economic benefits of education.

The rise of hip-hop culture in the 1990s and beyond has been mirrored by a decline in reading scores – and this is deemed to be more than coincidence. In addition, these boys frequently live in a toxic soup of poor self-discipline (if no adult models it for them, it isn’t likely to be learned), low parental expectations, and a sense that it is not “cool” to excel at school.

Further, these boys have few role models of successful stable black men; then too, they often live in a hostile “fight” culture, where aggression and physical violence become the perceived key to survival.

## Education Cont.

Academic excellence, in such a case, would be unexpected, if not miraculous. But if even high school graduation is not achieved, let alone a path to college success, these young men will be permanently 'left behind.' There is no easy answer to changing this paradigm, though here and there one hears stories of success because even one person believed in a student's future and mentored him.

But changing the lives of urban African-American students takes effort, time and attention – and the anti-education messages in hip-hop and broader urban culture are the enemies of such progress.

So too are society's perceptions, and the economic circumstances by which these boys are surrounded. The assumptions and stereotypes they deal with would make even the most hopeful and diligent student eventually feel trapped, confused and hopeless. If a child grows up in an environment of poverty and violence, it is hard to focus on a future in which there is a pay-off for academic success – or even on any kind of future.

As recent months have shown, young men are frequently demonized – as Trayvon Martin was – as potentially violent and dangerous, even as they are participating in the most harmless of actions. The media coverage of police violence against unarmed young black men can only further make these youth feel horrifically stereotyped as dangerous, and also, as if their lives matter little.

The public in general, it seems clear, has little conception of what these boys and young men deal with each day, nor do they seem to understand their viewpoint of the world these African-American boys naturally develop, based on their daily experiences. Some live in derelict and largely vacant neighborhoods that are preyed upon by drug dealers. It is hardly unexpected that these young men's priorities would be survival, not displaying their intelligence to a teacher.

So the skills that might enhance their odds of survival in a crime-ridden environment become paramount, as one might expect. Showing respect for peers, and displaying cooperation – the kind of behavior rewarded in an academic environment – can actually be perceived as weakness on crime-ridden streets.

We cannot expect young men who might never have had a father figure, or family members who display reliability and a belief in their child's success, to thrive without intervention. We also must imbue them with the belief that they are valuable, and that their future is worth investing in.

But what about their parents? Now we come to another important area of study – the examination of parental involvement and engagement, the lack of which is often blamed for a student's failure to succeed academically. Is that fair or accurate?

First, it is imperative to consider what the terms 'parental engagement' and 'parental involvement' mean – to parents, and to educators. Perhaps not surprisingly, these two groups differ in their definitions. Educators frequently say that they can't do the job of educating alone – that without parental involvement, students are unlikely to do even moderately well at school.

They also point to parents as not having laid a proper foundation early in a childhood, one that might have encouraged a child's cognitive and social development - by talking to the child, or playing learning games with them, among the many practices that parents in a middle-class world would take for granted as critical for their child's development.

In that case, a child enters school already at a huge disadvantage. Then, once in school, if a parent doesn't seem to show interest in how a child is performing in the classroom, why would the child himself care?

These seem like reasonable questions, but many parents have a different viewpoint.

Often, studies have shown, parents think of ‘parental involvement’ as participating in events at school. Many will say that because of their work and family responsibilities, they simply cannot be present for these - during or after the school day.

Teachers and administrators counter by saying that ‘parental involvement’ means such things as making sure a child is at school, on time and ready to learn, and satisfactorily completes his or her homework – as well as more ephemeral qualities, such as fostering a love of learning or reading in a child. So, already there is a huge gap in understanding. Many parents find the situation bewildering.

The too, many of them have their own negative history of schooling, and this still lingers. Others note that when they try to participate in their child’s classroom life they are made to feel unwelcome, if not condescended to. Some parents note they are working two or more jobs, and have other family obligations. They are not able to take ‘time off’ to show up for events or even teacher conferences - they will lose pay, and risk losing their jobs.

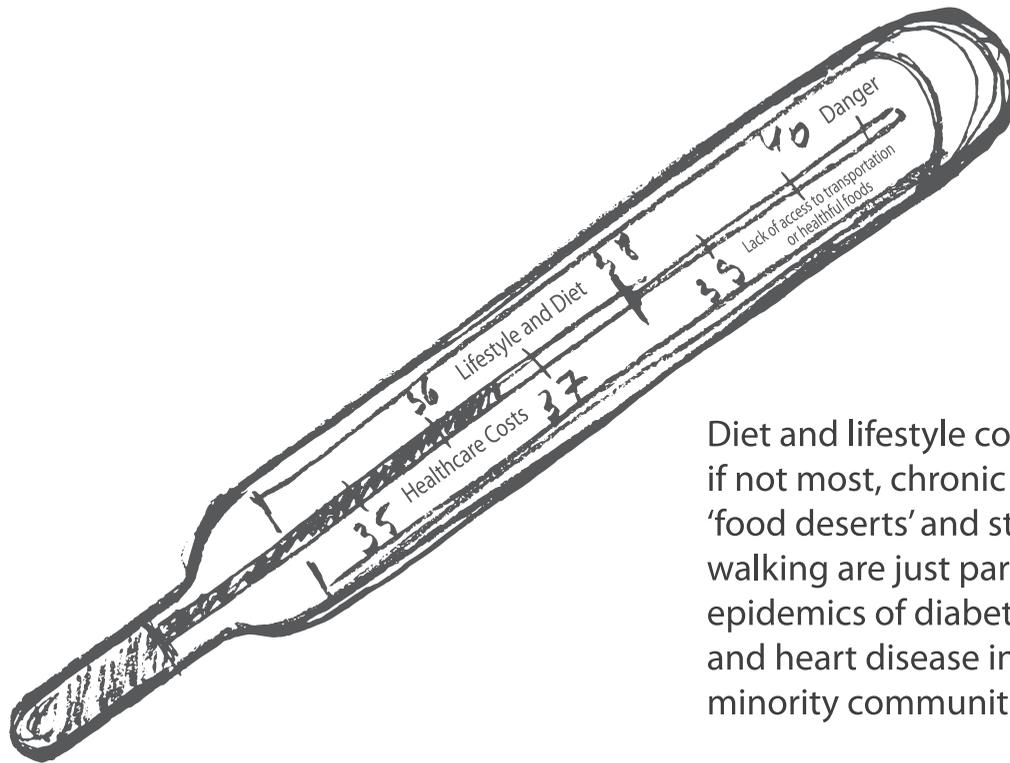
Also, they wonder, isn’t it the school’s job to educate?

With such miscommunication, the fine points of how a parent can help a child excel will flounder. Research shows that schools need to play their part properly and encourage, rather than admonish, parents – and that any level of parental involvement is a step in the right direction. They also must know – and many do – that children who are exposed to toxic stress on a daily basis in their home environment are going to have a difficult time at school, unless someone responsible is looking out for them and their welfare.

For their part, parents need to know that the most accurate predictor of a student’s success is a home environment that encourages learning, and one in which high expectations of academic success are set.

When parents and teachers/administrators can communicate clearly, without judgment, with compassion, and with respect for each other’s challenges, the student is far more likely to benefit.

Teachers/Administrators	Parents
<b>Miscommunications</b>	
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## Health and Wellness

As if a minority community’s challenges aren’t staggering enough, there is the matter of health. Yes, health, of which it is often said one doesn’t think much about until it is gone.

While the Affordable Care Act has at least temporarily (an upcoming U.S. Supreme Court decision is set to come this month) staved off disaster for many working Americans, who for the first time have access to affordable insurance – it doesn’t change the fact the region’s minority population suffers from low access to health care. The problem of health, or a lack of it – is multi-layered. Clearly, people who don’t have access to physicians get much sicker than those who do. Even uncomplicated medical conditions, ones that could be easily taken care of with prescriptions early on, can quickly turn into a serious illness. There is also the fact that there are a wide range of disparities in the medical care provided – income aside – to minorities and ethnic groups compared to white middle class patients.

Added to that is the knowledge that diet and lifestyle contribute to many, if not most, chronic illnesses – and ‘food deserts’ and streets unsafe for walking are just part of what leads to epidemics of diabetes, hypertension and heart disease in poverty-stricken minority communities.

Beyond the personal cost, though, illness is expensive all around. The health care challenges faced by the thousands and thousands of poverty-stricken people in our region have huge collateral costs – not just to their families and immediate communities, but to the region at large.

Sick people often cannot work, or cannot work up to their normal capacity. A population with many who are in poor health is one in which production is slowed when work days are missed, and when an employer’s health care costs rise because of a plethora of employees who are in ill health.

The numbers tell the story: Nearly \$7 billion annually is lost nationally to the costs of chronic disease. About 75 percent of that is due to lost productivity. Then there are the many early deaths that could be prevented – something that is sure to get much worse in an era when teenagers are already being diagnosed with diabetes. Permanent complications – vision loss, kidney and vascular damage – are now being seen as soon as the early 20s. Disability soon follows.

The bigger picture is disheartening too. What of the loss of human potential? People who are ill and suffering from chronic conditions may never accomplish what they could have in good health, and will not know what that might have been. This loss of a life unfulfilled due to ill health affects their families, their employers, their neighborhoods and the region at large.

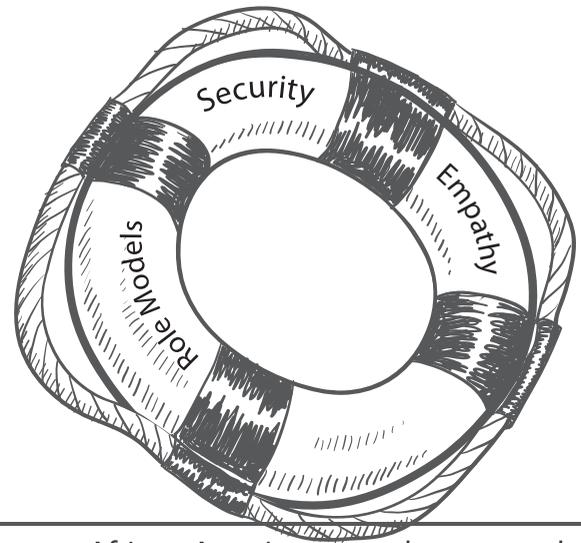
Part of the issue is the lack of attention that our region – and yes, our country – pays to preventative health. Obviously, it's always better to avoid illness than treat it, but that is easy to say, and not so easy to put into action. There have been heartening pockets of change to be seen: for example, the citywide initiative from 2012 known as "Healthy Cleveland," which Cleveland Mayor Frank Jackson initiated by involving the region's four largest health systems in a combined effort to educate Clevelanders about how to get healthier, with tactics such as providing more farmer's markets in neighborhoods, creating community-based exercise programs, and holding nutrition talks in locations convenient to residents of city neighborhoods.

Other heartening examples include the work of the Cuyahoga PLACEMATTERS team, which is part of the National Collaborative for Health Equity's 16-community U.S. initiative to improve health equity by developing policies, strategies and programs to eliminate the social determinants of health. Another example is the Health Improvement Partnership-Cuyahoga Consortium, a diverse and committed group of people who care about health who are building opportunities for everyone in Cuyahoga County to be healthy.

But more can and must be done – even as the future of the Affordable Health Care hangs in the balance. There are still many people who find it too difficult – because of where they live, their lack of access to transportation or healthful foods, let alone to affordable physician care – who suffer from unnecessary disease and become infirm at far too young an age.

The direct and indirect costs are borne by the entire region – from families, to employers, to taxpayers who end up, in effect, paying for higher bills when serious illness drives someone to an emergency room for a condition that could have been less expensively treated had it been caught earlier.

This is unacceptable, must be addressed, and the Affordable Health Care Act was one way to do that. It is still to be seen whether it remains the panacea it was designed to be.



# Community Revitalization and Redevelopment

There may be no better way to describe the situation for many young African-American men than to say that they encounter and live with a good deal of emotional pain. It's not only because of the poor economic circumstances of their families and environment, but because of society's perceptions of them. Negative assumptions and stereotypes of young black men abound, and the tragic shootings of unarmed young black men have shown what happens when people respond to those stereotypes by responding with acts of violence – which often go unpunished.

Not only are young African-Americans at a much higher risk of being victimized in such a way by those who respond to their fear by shooting them. But the fallout from these events, and the extensive media coverage that surrounds them, often serves only to make things worse.

Is it any wonder that so many of these boys feel trapped, confused and hopeless?

Many, if not most, do not have caring adults in their lives, or adults who serve as positive role models. Usually, they live in single-parent homes, or homes in which parents are absent and someone else, perhaps a grandparent, serves as their guardian. These young men grow up in an environment of instability and poverty, and often hunger; they are surrounded by violence and drugs. They often go to schools that are dilapidated, and they face daily threats on the streets they walk to get there. These are only rarely the kinds of neighborhoods where teens can count on concerned neighbors to keep an eye out for them.

Given these visual symbols and external messages, why wouldn't these young men think, "Who really cares about me?"

Yet most of society simply doesn't know or understand what daily life is for these disenfranchised boys. And here's the result: young African-American men develop different views of the world and how it works, based on their own experiences.

They do not grow up in an environment of collaboration and mediation – but one in which they must do what it takes to survive, even when that means fighting and arming themselves. The cooperation among peers that is taken for granted in even a modest-income suburb is rarely in evidence and it wouldn't make sense – being cooperative could easily be seen as weakness, and weakness results in being preyed upon in tough streets.

This is understandable behavior, given the environment, but it also leads to negative and detrimental behavior on the part of young men – behavior that limits, if not outright destroys, their future.

Re-examining our premises about African-American boys can broaden and deepen our society's understanding of their plight. Instead of stereotyping and demonizing these young men, and applying 'suburban' standards when viewing their behavior, considering the daily challenges they face in their environment provides an opportunity for empathy, which is a first step toward reaching out to create positive change.

# Workforce development

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When bad economic times hit, African-American communities suffer exponentially more than typical communities. Yet the depth of that economic suffering is often underestimated. For example, standard measures of joblessness often don't capture the true picture of what is happening in poor neighborhoods.

These are places where many people – especially men – wouldn't describe themselves as 'unemployed.' They may never have been employed, or engaged in the workforce, to begin with.

Even in good economic times, minority communities struggle. But bad times essentially bring socio-economic incapacitation. The joblessness that is typical in these communities perpetuates itself in neighborhoods mired in poor educational opportunities, high-foreclosure rates, poverty, drug abuse and crime.

Such communities are not rare. Ohio itself has felt the economic malaise more profoundly than many other states in the nation – which is evident by the fact that only 78 percent of black men in their prime working years are part of the labor force.

And again, the joblessness rate of African-American men is actually underestimated. Their unemployment is part of a terrible stew made up of the loss of manufacturing jobs, low educational attainment in the face of an era where jobs require more schooling; and poor health, among other contributing factors.

Then too, even as we see a rise in entrepreneurship in Ohio and throughout the nation, we see that African-American men are notably absent in the ranks of those who start their own businesses. There are likely several reasons for this: one is that they aren't encouraged to do so and another – a crippling one – is that they don't, and likely never will, have access to the kind of capital that is required. Not only do they not have their own economic resources for capital, they are highly unlikely to be given the loans that many entrepreneurs have access to through families, friends and contacts. The odds of getting investments from venture capitalists would be near zero.

Being an entrepreneur is challenging in the best of circumstances. It's nearly impossible when no one around you is capable of providing you with the expertise and business development advice that is necessary for a vision to become reality.

Simply put, African-American men often find themselves isolated from the worlds of business and entrepreneurship, and this isolation cuts them off from the opportunities – for networking and engagement - that many other people can take for granted.

Unless economic development organizations make serious and quantifiable efforts to reach out into minority communities and invite access, perhaps by starting to introduce young men in high school to the idea of being a business owner and creator - this dire lack of entrepreneurship is likely to continue to exist.



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# PolicyBridge Accomplishments and Impacts

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More than 10 years ago, Mark Batson, Timothy Goler and Randell McShepard were dreaming about creating a research and action public policy “think tank” that would focus on issues affecting African-Americans and other underserved communities. They envisioned developing new policies to solve long-standing social and economic issues.

By delving deeply into economic development, urban education, health and wellness, urban development and revitalization and workforce development issues, PolicyBridge was formed to provide a new and different voice to those attempting to improve economic and social conditions for racial, ethnic and financially disadvantaged populations. PolicyBridge’s new perspectives have broadened the scope of the discussions of the conditions and expanded how policies, strategies, programs and practices are being perceived, developed and implemented.

PolicyBridge’s work in the area of economic development has led to being included in regional economic competitiveness initiatives that are seeking to improve the participation and performance of African American, Latino and other underserved populations in Northeast Ohio. PolicyBridge has served as a source of subject-matter experts on initiatives such as the Fund for Our Economic Future’s Growth and Opportunity framework, created to connect people and communities through job creation, job access and job preparation. Through our efforts serving as a member of the Inclusion Committee of the Regional Economic Competitiveness Strategy, we have collaborated to develop recommendations to align business and philanthropic resources and actions to advance a growing opportunity-rich economy in Northeast Ohio that will outgrow the U.S. economy.

Forward Cities, a national learning collaborative project that partners with the Aspen Institute, the Urban Institute and Issue Media group, brings together donors and key stakeholders in New Orleans, Detroit, Durham and Cleveland to map, develop strategies and tools and measure innovation and improvements in their local entrepreneurial ecosystems. Participation in these and other economic competitiveness initiatives provided PolicyBridge with opportunities to discuss diversity, inclusion and equity perspectives that are based on data when implementing these new economic development initiatives.

The concerns surrounding urban educational quality, especially in the City of Cleveland, have been another area of study where PolicyBridge has sought new solutions to old problems. Based on the recommendations from our “Rap on Culture” report, PolicyBridge, when urged by local philanthropic organizations, conducted a ten (10-) month social media campaign pilot program called, “Education Get Yours.” It was designed to test the effect of positive messages about education success on the perceptions and attitudes of African-American male students ages 10 to 13. The pilot project found that concentrated positive messages directed at African-American boys in this age group who participated in the study did have an impact on their attitudes towards educational success.

PolicyBridge also partnered with Cleveland Mayor Frank Jackson, former Ohio State Senator Nina Turner, the city of Cleveland, other suburban school districts and the Educational Services Center of Cuyahoga County to create a summer academic curricula that focused on language arts, math and science for eighth grade Cuyahoga County students who were transitioning into the ninth grade in the fall. The Summary School Academic Academy was created to provide students with opportunities to continue to engage in language arts, math and science learning activities so that they would be better prepared to excel at their ninth grade work and complete the transition successfully. The Academy was structured to address data that indicated more students drop out of school when transitioning or during their ninth grade year than at any other time in their academic careers. The aggregate test results for students participating in the Academy showed small improvements in all circular areas.

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Over the last several years, PolicyBridge has engaged in activities that were designed to improve the health and wellness of everyone in the region. This report discusses our PLACEMATTERS and Health Improvement Partnership-Cuyahoga Consortium work, but we were also involved in other initiatives that were structured to inform and educate the public about the issues and conditions that contribute to poor health and health inequities.

Working with organizations such as Environmental Health Watch and the Free Clinic allowed PolicyBridge to inform stakeholders, at all levels of the community, that being healthy is not only about personal behavior and responsibility, but that there are factors that exist in communities beyond the control of individuals. These factors have significant impact on an individual's quality of life and health outcomes.

To this end, PolicyBridge has been very successful in influencing community stakeholders about the value of gaining new perspectives to achieve improved health equity outcomes. Based on this new emerging perspective, more people are looking to structural, institutional and systemic change strategies to address health disparities and inequities.

The Northeast Ohio Sustainable Communities Consortium was launched in January 2011. Leaders representing Northeast Ohio's 12-county region recognized that our futures are bound together, and they concluded that our region could be more successful if we worked to anticipate, prepare for and build that future together. PolicyBridge was a committed and dedicated participant in the three-year planning process that culminated in the creation "Vibrant NEO 2040" a guidebook for a more vibrant, resilient and sustainable Northeast Ohio.

The guidebook addressed three Northeast Ohio (NEO) questions: Where is NEO going? What future does NEO want for itself? How do we make it happen? The "Vibrant NEO 2040" guidebook is being used by regional metropolitan planning Organizations in addition to city and county governments, and local community development organizations in the region. Again, PolicyBridge provided perspectives for people from African-American, Latino, and financially distressed communities. These seldom heard voices were continually interjected into "Vibrant NEO 2040" discussions, planning and recommendations for action to promote diversity, inclusion and equity in land use, community planning and development strategies and outcomes.

During the past (10) years, PolicyBridge has worked to create a reputation as a "thought leader" in the region when discussing economic development, urban education, health and wellness, urban development and revitalization and workforce development issues affecting African-Americans and other underserved communities. As our reputation grew in stature, based on the quality of research and policy recommendation resulting from our findings, PolicyBridge is now recognized as a valuable asset in our regional landscape. We are also gaining increased recognition among our "think tank" counterparts working at the national level. This is evidenced by our leadership position in the Forward Cities Cleveland Innovation Council project. PolicyBridge was instrumental in bringing this project to Cleveland, and assisting with raising the needed funds to support the project.

It has been a very good (10) years for PolicyBridge, and we look forward to the next decade with great anticipation for continued organizational success.



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