POISE FOUNDATION

Strengthening
Black
Families

A CASE FOR
Philanthropic Investment

POISE Foundation – Vision and Mission

POISE envisions a Pittsburgh Region in which all members of the Black community are empowered and self-sufficient.

This vision is the core of the Foundation's philosophy and its approach to its work.

POISE's mission is:

To assist the Pittsburgh Region's Black community in achieving self-sustaining practices through strategic leadership, collective giving, grantmaking, and advocacy.

Acknowledgments

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About POISE Foundation

POISE Foundation began in December of 1980 as the first public foundation in the state of Pennsylvania organized and managed by African Americans. The purpose of the Foundation is to develop and enhance the participation of Black philanthropists in the economic and social development of the Black community. For 35 years, the Foundation has been supporting programs that add value to the quality of life of Black Pittsburgh and its surrounding regions; and has expanded its services to impact Black families and their communities across the US. This was the vision of our founder Bernard H. Jones, Sr., of an empowered community, able to take care of itself.

POISE Foundation employs collective giving to enable donors to realize their philanthropic goals, pooling resources to provide funding to worthy organizations and causes. Donors may give to the Foundation's general unrestricted endowment, where funds are pooled to make a greater impact on the Pittsburgh Region. Donors may also start their own individual endowment funds to support their specific charitable interests and organizations. As of December 2014, the Foundation manages more than 150 funds with a balance of over $6,500,000.

Collective giving enables POISE to provide grants to programs and projects that primarily benefit the Black Community. The Foundation's grants are typically small, yet over its grantmaking history; POISE has impacted the Greater Pittsburgh Region and beyond with more than $9,000,000 of direct financial support to organizations assisting our most underserved populations. The Foundation currently focuses its unrestricted endowed funds on programs and services that aim to Strengthen Black Families.

We are excited to release our first publication, Strengthening Black Families: A Case for Philanthropic Investment.

When we first announced our new grantmaking strategy focused on Black families (2012), it included an expanded programmatic role beyond grantmaking. This new strategy called for us to become a thought leader in philanthropy by incorporating strategic leadership and advocacy in our efforts.

This new role will help us to leverage our position as a community foundation, and to introduce new philanthropic strategies and approaches that will create a greater positive impact on Black communities.

We strongly believe that philanthropic investments that are focused on the family can help improve the quality of life for Black individuals, families, and communities.

It is our hope that this paper encourages funders to leverage one of the most critical assets in the Black community: the Black family.

Karris M. Jackson

Karris M. Jackson | Vice President of Programs
POISE Foundation

Setting the Stage

14.1%

Unemployment rate for Blacks in
Greater Pittsburgh

69%

Graduation rate among Black High
School Students in Pittsburgh

"What approach will ultimately transform the socioeconomic trajectory of Black individuals, families, and communities?"

The POISE Foundation is an African American led community foundation whose mission is to assist the Pittsburgh Region's Black community in achieving self-sustaining practices. It carries out this mission through strategic leadership, collective giving, grantmaking, and advocacy. Over the years, POISE has provided a broad range of grants to area nonprofits in support of its mission.

However, while the Foundation has seen returns on its investments, its broad, short-term, small-scale approach to grantmaking has not been able to make significant headway against the structural, political, and economic barriers that bind Pittsburgh's Black community.

Thus, in 2010, POISE commissioned an environmental scan to inform the development of a new grantmaking strategy. ABFE, a membership-based organization that advocates for responsive and transformative investments in Black communities, conducted national and local research to garner information from a wide range of stakeholders. Special emphasis was placed on developing a deeper understanding of the most pressing conditions and issues impacting Pittsburgh's Black families.

Compelling data[i] pointed to the need to shift the Foundation's focus from the alleviation of symptomatic problems to the building of strong families and community sustainability. More specifically, ABFE recommended that POISE:

- **Develop a broad framework and theory of change to strengthen Black families in Pittsburgh.** The wellbeing of Black families in Pittsburgh can be improved by strengthening family connections to 1) economic opportunities that address the extreme rates of poverty; 2) social networks that build trust and neighborliness; and 3) a broad array of supportive services (social, cultural, and, respite) that help parents raise and protect their children.

- **Encourage the public, philanthropic, and nonprofit sectors, together with Black families, to assess policies and programs in order to ensure that they are accessible, are free of bias, and help build positive Black identity.** POISE may use some of its resources to support analyses of state, county, and/or privately funded programs to determine how—and if—they can better support Black families.

- **Support opportunities for positive family interactions, as well as parent respite; consider the large number of non-custodial fathers in this regard, and encourage recreational and cultural activities that involve them.** Families want and need time to have fun together and enjoy each other—yet these opportunities are not available to all.

- **Invest in strategies for building social networks that strengthen families.** There seem to be few intentional strategies for building connectedness and trust among and between families—the kind of trust that develops authentic "helping networks" in neighborhoods. Family connections and a greater sense of neighborhood trust may also help to address issues of violence and the resulting trauma. In addition, social networks are a means for transferring information that confers culture, identity, and normative behaviors among Black families.

Against this backdrop, POISE instituted its Strengthening Black Families (SBF) program strategy in 2012. The Foundation realized the importance of new and transformative approaches in supporting community change, and believed that strengthening the family was one such approach. It began to see strong families as essential in elevating and sustaining a higher quality of life.

Thus, POISE now intentionally seeks to lift up and support the family as a core institution around which Pittsburgh's Black community may redevelop.

This position paper provides a rationale for the POISE Foundation's shift to a family-centered approach. It introduces POISE's new Strengthening Black Families (SBF) program strategy as a promising case example. It also considers how other funders might employ such a lens in their work—and make investments toward similar goals.

This is a unique time in the history of the United States. The inequality between mainstream Americans and those living in marginalized communities continues to grow at an alarming rate. Meanwhile, stakeholders from diverse sectors, including philanthropy, search for new and effective approaches and solutions.

It is POISE's hope that this paper will create the impetus for a new dialogue—and a new direction—within the philanthropic community. We encourage funders to see how investments in strengthening families can address the most critical issues facing America—and, in particular, its Black communities.

Executive Summary

Over the past five decades, social services and programs have placed ever more emphasis on institutional supports rather than on kinship and mutual aid networks. As a result, the roles and responsibilities that, for generations, were inherent functions of the Black family have been:

- **outsourced** to other domains of public life—e.g., social welfare programs;

- **weakened** in the face of systemic barriers (e.g., limited economic and educational opportunity) and community adversity (e.g., violence, mass incarceration, and limited support outside of social welfare programs); and/or

- **silenced** by (or only faintly heard under) the deafening cries for solutions that focus on either individuals or systems—solutions that fail to seriously consider the intricate and interdependent relationship among individuals, families, and community.

Meanwhile, Blacks in America continue to experience a wide range of harmful socioeconomic outcomes. Inequitable practices still plague many social, economic, political, and educational institutions. Funders and other key stakeholders continue to wonder: What strategies or approaches can ultimately improve the socioeconomic trajectory of Black individuals, families, and communities? After years of investment with limited returns, some funders wonder whether the current range of solutions can create long-term positive, sustainable change.

This position paper sees an opportunity for greater return on our philanthropic investments in the Black community through more indigenous approaches—in particular, through intentionally lifting up and supporting the Black family as a core social institution.

The Black family, like other families, contributes to the wellbeing of its members and of society. It is individuals' first teacher and first responder. It is the first—and often the primary—provider of emotional, social, and financial support. As we will see, the Black family is thus ideally poised to be an agent of community redevelopment and transformation.

Shifting the Paradigm

Policymakers, philanthropists, social service workers, and others who are committed to working in (or on behalf of) the Black community do not always uplift and support the institution of the Black family. Yet the Black family can be a viable and valuable resource for improving the lives of individuals and communities. Professionals can (and should) leverage the natural supports, relationships, and resources that are already active in families' everyday lives.

Funders can support such efforts by investing in initiatives that:

- Re-engage the family unit around roles and responsibilities that are natural to family functioning—and that have contributed to family and community resilience over the centuries;

- Strengthen and build capacity (e.g., resilience and mutual support) in aspects of the family that have been weakened by situational factors;

- Counter or buffer against policies and practices that harm the Black family as a core institution; and

- Lift up the importance of the Black family in supporting the health, wellbeing, and success of individuals and communities.

The POISE Foundation's Strengthening Black Families program strategy offers a set of such approaches. SBF is organized into four categories of work: **community engagement; grantmaking; research and policy; and thought leadership.** SBF seeks to:

- Promote community learning and dialogues on the Black family, with an emphasis on strengthening, supporting, and uplifting the institution of family;

- Invest in culturally and contextually responsive projects that promote family wellness and positive family interactions—e.g., improved family communication, more and higher-quality family time (family dinners, outings, etc.), greater family civic engagement, and greater family resilience;

- Encourage other private and public investments that focus specifically on the development of strong Black families;

- Understand which current policies and programs negatively impact Pittsburgh's Black families, and in what ways; and

- Shift the mindsets of philanthropic leaders to encourage their support of the Black family, and to promote thought leadership that leads to family-centered changes in theory, research, policy, practice, and paradigms.

Beyond POISE: Family-Centered Approaches in Philanthropy

POISE recognizes that it cannot do this work alone. Thus, the Foundation values the opportunity it has to lead and encourage other foundations to:

- Engage Black families around what is needed to strengthen family units.

- Examine and realign their grantmaking portfolios around a family-centered approach. This includes asking questions such as:

    » Are our current investments strengthening or weakening the institution of the Black family?

    » Do they support strong relationships among family members?

    » Do they help families care for and encourage all their members?

    » Do they encourage greater connection and contribution among all family members?

- Consider how they might use a family lens to help them fulfill their missions, achieve their visions, address core issues, and/or fund their core activities. A focus on the family at the expense of other key institutions or domains would of course not be useful. However, a family lens can be used to design initiatives that impact multiple quality-of-life domains. For example, a foundation might fund family-based financial literacy programs, or invest in efforts that promote school as a learning community for the entire family.

- Invest in efforts that 1) strengthen and support the family in its role as a core institution; 2) leverage the value and power of the indigenous characteristics of the Black family; and 3) help families develop the capacity to be change agents in community revitalization.

- Invest in research into family-centered approaches, particularly those that engage Black families as key stakeholders and unique experts.

- Build a knowledge base among key stakeholders—including both formal and informal family experts—on the topic of strengthening Black families. This includes convening groups of stakeholders to discuss issues and approaches, and to teach and learn from one another. It is important for the philanthropic community to develop a body of knowledge about what works (and what doesn't) in and for Black families and communities.

- Learn more about, and adopt, approaches that are culturally and contextually driven. Every family is part of a culture, a community, and a social context. Strengthening Black families does not occur in a vacuum; it goes hand in hand with strengthening institutions, building community, increasing network connections, and challenging pernicious systems, policies, and practices.

POISE Foundation hopes this paper will be the catalyst for a new dialogue in the philanthropic community. Perhaps it can also ignite a collective movement of funders who see that investing in Black families is the key to creating stronger communities and a higher quality of life.

Transforming the Socioeconomic Trajectory of Black Communities

The phrase "there is a crisis" is a theme of many reports on the state of the Black community across the country. This crisis has come to be seen as perpetual and far-reaching.

It is characterized by cries of injustice by Blacks, particularly as the lives of young Black men[ii] are taken by mainstream Americans in the name of "self defense." It is part of the public-health concern about Black youth violence[iii] in urban communities. It is, without fail, characterized by pervasive negative socioeconomic outcomes for Blacks (as compared to whites) on every measure of wellbeing.

This outcry of "crisis" often serves as a call to action for community leaders, professionals, politicians, and funders. Yet it begs the question: How do we respond?

- What *strategies*, for example, would reduce the 11.2% national unemployment rate for Black males (9.6% rate for Black females)[iv] —or, in the case of Greater Pittsburgh, where the POISE Foundation focuses its efforts, the 14.1% unemployment rate for Blacks[v]?

- What *tactics* would improve the 66.1%[vi] national graduation rate among Black high school students, or the 69%[vii] Black graduation rate in Pittsburgh?

- What *interventions* would prevent the mass incarceration[viii] of Black males, and its multi-generational impact on Black families?

- What *solutions* would reduce the number of Black children growing up in single parent homes[ix], or improve the situations of single parents who must raise their children on limited resources?

Underlying each of these questions is a broader question: What approach will ultimately transform the socioeconomic trajectory of Black individuals, families, and communities?

While there have been some promising strategies that have led to improved outcomes for Blacks, so far we have been largely unable to bring these efforts to scale to create a widespread positive impact.

Furthermore, another question remains: Will programmatic policy- and community-based solutions alone create long-term positive, sustainable change? If not, is there an opportunity to see a greater return on investment through the inclusion of more indigenous approaches in the Black community?

Over the years, some members of the philanthropic community have moved toward more culturally responsive strategies. One example of this shift has been the gradually

growing emphasis on Black men and boys. Several prominent foundations—and, more recently, the federal government, through its My Brother's Keeper initiative—have come to recognize that many Black males do not have access to the structural supports and opportunities needed to thrive[x]. Consequently, funders have developed initiatives to increase opportunities, and identify and bolster failing (or absent) supports for Black males.

While these culturally contextual, gender-based approaches are promising, they also share a glaring limitation: a lack of explicit consideration for the primary context in which Black males live—the family. Black men and boys are fathers, husbands, sons, brothers, uncles, grandsons, nephews, and stepfathers. Their ability to thrive is impacted by their relationships with spouses, romantic partners, co-parents, children, mothers, siblings, and extended family. Their own successes and struggles also impact other family members and family relationships.

Why Family Matters

The family is one of five core social institutions in any society. It also has economic, educational, political, and religious aspects and effects. It lies at the intersection of the individual-societal relationship and is a linchpin

> **❝ The family is—both implicitly and explicitly—part of the mix of everyday life for individuals, communities, and society as a whole. Yet it has remained on the margins in theories of change, logic models, and grantmaking strategies.❞**

of human development. The family is responsible for passing on generational traditions and providing a sense of belonging and identity. The homeplace, the family's primary dwelling, can be a place of refuge and support

for individuals. It also serves as a training ground for its members' social and cultural identity.

The family is—both implicitly and explicitly—part of the mix of everyday life for individuals, communities, and society as a whole. Yet it has remained on the margins of theories of change, logic models, and grantmaking strategies.

Focusing on the Family: A Historical Note

The current emphases on individuals and communities (and the lack of emphasis on families) in grantmaking strategies may stem from the nature of the philanthropic community itself, which is typically:

- driven by individual and community outcomes that are readily measurable, and thus ostensibly able to provide clear evidence of success (or failure);

- motivated by philosophical underpinnings that suggest that the root causes of any problem lie at the individual and/or community levels;

- conditioned by history and the philanthropic community's typical role in efforts such as the War on Poverty[xi]; and/or

- guided by theories of change that promote and support transactional solutions[xii], which typically focus on helping Blacks navigate and rebound within an inherently unjust system.

Overall, there has been relatively little focus on the Black family in grantmaking. Yet the family has long been seen—among Black scholars, professionals, community leaders, and ordinary family members—as a source, solution, and resource for addressing a wide range of issues affecting Blacks and the Black community[xiii].

What accounts for this disparity? For one thing, focusing in a helpful way on the Black family hasn't been an easy task. Historically, any focus on the Black family has been mired in controversy[xiv].   Even today, a long-standing, cyclical debate continues on the dysfunctional vs.

resilient nature of the Black family. Furthermore, much of the attention the Black family gets is dominated by discussions on family structure (i.e. female headed vs. male headed vs. two-parent) and its importance for individual and community wellbeing.

These factors have distracted professionals, including those in the philanthropic community, from concentrating on the Black family as a valuable core social institution. As a result, programs, policies, services, and grantmaking strategies often do very little to uplift and support the family's natural role in contributing to the wellbeing of its members. Opportunities to leverage the family and its myriad of assets have thus been largely ignored.

Yet those opportunities have not gone away. A plethora of family-based solutions can play a part in alleviating the crisis in the Black community that is spoken of so often.

Lifting Up and Supporting the Black Family as a Core Institution

In order to understand and adopt a paradigm that lifts up and supports the Black family, we need to understand its historical role and the factors that have impacted its functioning.

The family, whether nuclear or extended, provides:

1. instrumental support (i.e., tangible, concrete, direct support—food, shelter, clothing, and money);

2. emotional support (i.e., empathy, concern, affection, love, trust, acceptance, intimacy, encouragement, protection, and caring);

3. informational support (advice, guidance, suggestions, useful information, and problem-solving strategies); and

4. companionship (a sense of belonging, security, and satisfaction).

The family is also the first teacher, responder, and ally for each of its members.

This is true for Black families and, indeed, all families. However, we must also note that the Black family has historically been of critical importance to the survival of its members and the Black community. As John Hope Franklin (2007) observes:

the family is one of the strongest and most important traditions in the black community….There is no question that early in their sojourn on this continent, enslaved Africans evinced their concern about the family unit. Their loyalty to the family defied the efforts of slave owners to promote a casual attitude among blacks toward this all-important institution.

In addition to the universal role[xv] that the family plays, the Black family—as first responder—has also had to function in the face of structural racism. Historically in the United States, it has often replaced or compensated for other core social institutions (such as government, education, and economic institutions) when, because of discrimination, those institutions were absent or inadequate[xvi].

For many generations, the Black family has demonstrated

> **" the family is one of the strongest and most important traditions in the black community…. [Slaves'] loyalty to the family defied the efforts of slave owners to promote a casual attitude among blacks toward this all-important institution."**
> **-John Hope Franklin**

perseverance and resilience. These factors have enabled it to repeatedly meet the needs of its members, as well as the demands made upon it by other systems and institutions. For example, as Nancy Boyd-Franklin (2007)

explains:

African culture emphasizes the "survival of the tribe." This ethos has persisted, and the consequent survival skills are among the most significant strengths of African American families today.

Furthermore, the Black family's homeplace has routinely served as a site of resistance, "the place where African Americans could freely confront humanization issues, develop political consciousness, and resist racist stereotypes and oppression"[xvii].

Traditional aspects—and indelible strengths—of the Black American family include:

- strong kinship bonds (caring for its members);

- a strong work orientation (self-help and a focus on improving its members' economic status);

- adaptability and flexibility in caring for its members;

- a high achievement orientation; and

- a religious orientation[xviii].

As John Hope Franklin notes (2007), despite the discriminatory policies and practices in place, until the 1960s fully 75% of Black marital unions remained intact. The Black family was able to adjust and survive because it was interconnected with extended kin networks and the broader Black community. The Black community, in turn, developed mechanisms to meet the needs of its members that were unmet by mainstream educational and economic institutions. As the Black family survived, the Black community survived. As the Black community survived, the Black family survived.

While the Black family has been able to rebound and withstand many challenges, the fabric of the family has weakened over the past five decades. What accounts for this shift in an institution that has proven unusually resilient for generations?

There are several possible influences. One is rapid urbanization[xix]. Nuclear families' migration to large cities separated them from extended family networks. Without the "village," they were left with limited support and

resources.

Another possible cause is the racially hostile social and governmental policies over the past 50 years. In particular, in the late 1960s, an array of social welfare policies and programs were developed—and then expanded—to address the "disorganization" of the Black family or its "deviant" structure[xx]. Despite their ostensibly good intentions, many of these policies and programs actually eroded Black two-parent families and extended families. As K. Sue Jewell (2003) explains:

[I]n the case of liberal social policy, in which numerous social and economic programs were developed and entitlement was liberalized, government social welfare programs replaced mutual-aid networks,[xxi] transferring dependency from non-institutional support systems to institutional ones….In addition to their failure to bring about social and economic parity, social welfare programs drastically altered non-institutional support systems and modified value and belief systems, thereby accelerating the demise of African American two-parent and extended families and the growth of African American female-headed families. Moreover, the introduction of a plethora of social programs did more than modify the structure of African American families. It radically changed the life cycle of African American families.

To further complicate matters, these shifts occurred alongside two additional trends:

1. Philanthropic investments that followed or mirrored governmental approaches, including those focused on programmatic solutions, beginning during the War on Poverty.

2. The Black middle-class movement toward opportunities afforded by the civil rights amendments. This exodus further dismantled the once-segregated, cohesive, and self-reliant Black community, and created a certain level of isolation for many Black families.

Both of these shifts largely dismantled—or blunted the effectiveness of—the family and community support systems that had sustained and supported Blacks for generations.

Consequently, by the mid-1980s, roles and responsibilities that were inherent functions of the Black family had increasingly become:

1. *outsourced* to other domains of public life—e.g., social welfare programs;

2. *weakened* in the face of systemic barriers (e.g., limited economic and educational opportunity) and community adversity (e.g., community violence, mass incarceration, and limited support outside of institutions); and/or

3. *silenced* by (or only faintly heard under) the deafening cries for solutions that focus on either individuals or systems—solutions that fail to consider the intricate and interdependent relationship among individuals, families, and communities.

Making The Turn

For many generations, then, the Black family proved to be one of the strongest and most important institutions in the Black community. Its recent weakening, since the civil rights movement and the War on Poverty, is not irrevocable.

Clearly, a new approach to the crisis in the Black community is warranted. But perhaps this "new" approach should look to the past, and acknowledge and highlight the importance of the institution of the Black family.

History suggests that when Black families are able to operate in their natural roles as teachers, supporters, and first responders, its members are able to survive—and, in some cases, thrive—even in the most adverse circumstances. It also suggests that when Black families aren't permitted to function in these roles, there are far-reaching negative consequences.

How, then, do we lift up and

support the Black family as first responders, teachers, and supporters? How do we champion policies and practices that elevate the Black family in its natural role, and empower it to challenge the systems that negatively impact it?

An Appropriate Family-Centered Approach

It is not enough to merely say, "We need to focus on the Black family," because no family operates in a vacuum; it always influences, and is influenced by, a variety of other contexts and factors. Any philanthropic effort needs to view the family—whether nuclear or extended—as a system, and as part of a larger

macrosystem or ecology[xxii]. Consequently, solutions that focus on the Black family also need to cross multiple systems and account for the macrosystem (e.g., social policies, cultural norms and expectations, major events, etc.).

Such approaches do need to place the family at the center, however. For example, explicit goals might include "strengthening relationships among family members, supporting families in their primary function of caring for their members, and encouraging contributions of whole families and all their members to their communities"[xxiii].

Three critical questions need to be asked throughout the development of any family-centered effort:

- "Does this effort support strong relationships among family members?

- Does this effort help families do their job of caring for and encouraging all their members?

- Does this effort bring the whole family and all of its members into a greater sense of connection and contribution to the community?"[xxiv]

POISE's Strengthening Black Families Strategy

The POISE Foundation's Strengthening Black Families (SBF) strategy is situated firmly within this family-centered frame. It intentionally lifts up family relationships, and it pays particular attention to improving families' ability to carry out the tasks, functions, and processes that support the wellbeing of family members and the family unit. Specifically, it supports efforts that:

- Re-engage the family unit around internal roles and responsibilities that are natural to family functioning—and that have contributed to family and community resilience over the centuries;

- Strengthen and build capacity (e.g., resilience and mutual support) in aspects of the family that have been weakened by situational factors;

- Counter or buffer against policies and practices that harm the Black family as a core institution; and

- Lift up the importance of the Black family in supporting the health, wellbeing, and success of individuals and communities.

To accomplish this, the Foundation has organized its work into four categories: community engagement; grantmaking; research and policy; and thought leadership. The overall goals of the SBF strategy in each of these areas are to:

- Promote community learning and dialogues on the Black family, with an emphasis on strengthening, supporting, and uplifting the institution of family;

- Invest in culturally and contextually responsive projects that promote family wellness and positive family interactions —e.g., improved family communication, more and higher-quality family time (family dinners, outings, etc.); greater family civic engagement; and greater family resilience;

- Encourage other private and public investments that focus specifically on the development of strong Black

families;

- Understand which current policies and programs negatively impact Greater Pittsburgh's Black families; and

- Shift the mindsets of philanthropic leaders to encourage their support of the Black family, and to promote thought leadership that leads to family-centered changes in theory, research, policy, practice, and paradigms.

> **" POISE is committed to sharing its work in ways that advance practice, policy, research, and investments in family-centered grantmaking."**

POISE began its journey toward this family-centered approach to grantmaking by convening a national advisory committee in 2013. This committee, which has been instrumental in helping POISE move from theories and principles to practicing this new family-centered approach, is comprised of local and national experts who have a working knowledge of Black families and family-centered strategies and initiatives. It includes professionals, community leaders, scholars and researchers, parent advocates, and philanthropic leaders.

In 2013, with the help of the SBF Advisory Committee and a consultant with expertise in the sociology of the family, the POISE Foundation launched its Promoting Positive Family Interactions (PPFI) Demonstration Grant. This grantmaking strategy was designed to fund projects that encouraged healthy family interactions. It was also part of a process of intentional, intensive, and continuous learning for the Foundation.

Many lessons were learned throughout the first year of the PPFI Demonstration Grant. The process led the Foundation and PPFI grantees to deeply question and closely examine what it means to do family-centered work. Since then, both POISE and its grantees have worked to align their organizations' guiding principles and

practices with these learnings.

For POISE, this required some intentional shifts in grantmaking, including:

- Investing in consultation and technical assistance from a family expert to ensure POISE's fidelity to, and alignment with, a family-centered approach;

- Demonstrating moderate flexibility throughout the RFP process, as lessons learned during each phase were used to inform later steps;

- Engaging PPFI grantees as partners in creating the desired transformations;

- Making multi-year funding commitments, and providing coaching and technical assistance for PPFI grantees to help them sustain organizational learning in family-centered practices; and

- Instituting a continuous and reflective learning process within both the Foundation and a learning cohort of PPFI grantees. This has enabled POISE to capture and document insights, lessons learned, and outcomes, and to promote thought leadership in family-centered practices and grantmaking.

The next phase of the Foundation's work will focus on research and policy. POISE will also continue to look for ways to restore a sense of cultural pride and institutional vibrancy for Black families and the Black community in Pittsburgh. During the last half of 2014, POISE has done this by introducing positive images of Black families through billboards and print media. The Foundation will continue to use the imaging work as a mechanism to uplift and strengthen Black families, and to shift the paradigm around it.

As POISE continues to learn through its new grantmaking approach, it will be important to communicate its learnings to funders, professionals, policymakers, and members of the broader community. The Foundation is committed to sharing its work, and its results, in ways that advance practice, policy, research, and investments in family-centered grantmaking.

Looking Beyond POISE: Family-Centered Approaches in Philanthropy

In order to advance the field's thinking and action, POISE offers the following recommendations to other funders that wish to invest in the development of strong Black families:

- Engage Black families around what is needed to strengthen family units.

- Examine and realign their grantmaking portfolios in light of a family-centered approach. This includes asking questions such as:

  » Are our current investments strengthening or weakening the institution of the Black family?

  » Do they support strong relationships among family members?

  » Do they help families care for and encourage all their members?

  » Do they encourage greater connection and contribution among all family members?

- Consider how they might use a family lens to help them fulfill their missions, achieve their visions, address core issues and/or fund their core activities. A focus on the family at the expense of other key institutions or domains would of course not be useful. However, a family lens can be used to design initiatives that impact multiple quality-of-life domains. For example, a foundation might fund family-based financial literacy programs, or invest in efforts that promote school as a learning community for the entire family.

- Invest in efforts that 1) strengthen and support the family in its role as a core institution; 2) leverage the value and power of the indigenous characteristics of the Black family; and 3) help families develop the capacity to be change agents in community revitalization.

- Invest in research into family-centered approaches, particularly those that engage Black families as key stakeholders and unique experts.

- Build a knowledge base among key stakeholders—including both formal and informal family experts—on the topic of strengthening Black families. This includes convening groups of stakeholders to discuss issues and approaches, and to teach and learn from one another. It is important for the philanthropic community to develop a body of knowledge about what works (and what doesn't) in and for Black families and communities.

- Learn more about, and adopt, approaches that are culturally and contextually driven. Every family is part of a culture, a community, and a social context. Strengthening Black families does not occur in a vacuum; it goes hand in hand with strengthening institutions, building community, increasing network connections, and challenging pernicious systems, policies, and practices.

Throughout this position paper, POISE has made a bold claim: we and other funders must refocus on one of the strongest and most important institutions in the Black community: the family.

This claim is no mere hope or theory. It is supported by a great deal of research and many generations of history—as well as by the comments of recent focus group participants. The Black family can be a linchpin for positive individual and community change.

Philanthropic work and investment should not end with Black men and boys or Black women and girls. If the philanthropic community is to fully support the premise that Black lives matter (#blacklivesmatter[xxv]), it must also attend to the primary institution that has made Black lives count for many generations: the family.

This paper is intended as a call to action; as the catalyst for a new dialogue; and as the beginning of a new movement within the philanthropic community to strengthen and support the Black family.

Summary of Recommendations for Grantmaking to Strengthen Black Families November 2010[*]

A Philanthropic Partnership for Black Communities

Background and Context

In 2010, The Association of Black Foundation Executives (ABFE) partnered with the POISE Foundation to redesign its grantmaking strategy for strengthening Black families in Pittsburgh. We gathered information and perspectives from a wide range of stakeholders through:

A literature review, to ground our thinking in what's known about strengthening families—and Black families in particular;

Discussions with ABFE's national network of researchers, foundation leaders, and nonprofit leaders, to learn about promising programs for strengthening Black families;

Focus groups of area community-based service providers, to garner their insights; and

Focus groups of (plus limited survey data from) Black families living in Pittsburgh.

* The full recommendations are outlined in a series of documents: *POISE Recommendations Memo; A Review of Literature on Strengthening Black Families: Setting an Agenda for Philanthropy; Strong Black Family and Community Survey: Summary of Findings;* and *Focus Group Headlines* (dated 11/30/2010). The material presented here has been slightly edited for clarity and compression.

What We Learned

Community Strengths

Family representatives participating in the survey saw their neighborhoods as good places to raise families and felt that the families in their communities were strong. Many said that there were already good programs in the communities for when people needed food or money, or help with other problems. These positive responses imply both community pride and family resilience (i.e., families are making it with what already exists).

But a deeper set of questions painted a slightly different picture. Respondents were asked about features that would be important for families in their communities; then they were asked to compare that ideal with what they observed in their day-to-day lives. A sharp contrast between the two emerged. Only a few family representatives said that parents and children spent time doing fun things together; or that parents and kids had time to simply talk every day; or that parents helped their children with their homework. Yet all of these are deemed important for keeping families strong.

Challenges Facing Black Families

Focus group participants identified several challenges facing Black families in Pittsburgh, including extreme poverty; hopelessness; a breakdown of indigenous institutions that support parents and families; a breakdown of community leadership; a lack of fathers in the home; pervasive violence and fear; and mental health issues that are systematically undetected or undiagnosed.

Residents also identified the causes of these challenges: a lack of connectedness and trust between families (both within and across economic classes); public housing displacement and gentrification (this may be a cause of the disconnection cited above); insufficiently funded and poorly run institutions, which fail to provide parents with the supports they need to be parents; a culture that works against educational achievement and success; and a lack of Black family and community wealth.

There was a subtle, but repeated and consistent, refrain that recalled a past when there was a strong undercurrent of cultural pride and institutional vibrancy in Black Pittsburgh.

Focus group participants stressed that families need more than just recreation, family time, and supportive services. They also need a connection to culturally relevant—i.e., African-centered— community and celebratory practices. These can help Black families to renew and reinforce themselves in the current hostile environment.

The focus group of funders suggested that there were few solid organizations to fund that served the Black community; similarly, the focus group of residents suggested that there were few organizations providing services. The focus group of nonprofit service providers offered a third take, which dovetails with the other two: respondents said that there are many organizations working in or serving Black neighborhoods, but that they often struggle to survive and operate in a competitive environment.

What POISE Should Do

ABFE encourages POISE to build on two key sets of principles and values that have helped lead Blacks in this country to greater prosperity, health,

and well-being over time: collective responsibility, self-help, and cultural pride (including support for the institutions, authentic social networks, and strategies that promote these values); and equity and fairness in policies and programs (including reform efforts that aim to reduce the negative effects of current and past practices on Black families).

To promote these principles and values, ABFE encourages POISE to focus on these five strategies:

1. Develop a broad framework and theory of change to strengthen Black families in Pittsburgh. The wellbeing of Black families in Pittsburgh can be improved by strengthening family connections to: 1) economic opportunities that address the extreme rates of poverty; 2) social networks that build trust and neighborliness; and 3) a broad array of supportive social services (social, cultural, and respite) that help parents raise and protect their children.

2. Encourage the public, philanthropic, and nonprofit sectors, together with Black families, to assess policies and programs in order to ensure that they are accessible, are free of bias, and help build positive Black identity. POISE may use some of its resources to support analyses of state, county, and/or privately funded programs to determine how—and if—they can better support Black families.

3. Support opportunities for positive family interactions, as well as parent respite; consider the large number of non-custodial fathers in this regard, and explore the role of recreational and cultural activities that involve them. Families want and need time to have fun together and enjoy each other—yet these opportunities are not available to all.

4. Invest in strategies to build social networks that strengthen families. There seem to be few intentional strategies for building connectedness and trust among and between families—the kind of trust that develops authentic "helping networks" in neighborhoods. Family connections and a greater sense of neighborhood trust may also help to address issues of violence and the resulting trauma. Social networks are also a means for transferring information that confers culture, identity, and normative behaviors among Black families.

5. Reduce the amount and impact of mental illness in Black communities. Support efforts to organize and train informal faith-based and community networks, under the supervision of licensed mental health providers; support other efforts to relieve emotional distress; screen for more severe mental health conditions that require professional intervention.

The POISE Foundation's Strengthening

COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

Creating venues for community learning and dialogue that define strong Black families

	Strategy	POISE Role	Audience(s)
Strategy 1	Engaging local media about positive and diverse images of Black families	Catalyst and grantmaker	Black community, policymakers, nonprofit leaders, and the general public
Strategy 2	Strengthening Black Families National Advisory Committee	Convener and catalyst	POISE Foundation
Strategy 3	Commissioning a series of papers	Catalyst and convener	Black community, policymakers, nonprofit leaders, and the general public
Strategy 4	Community conversations on the Black family	Catalyst and convener	Black community

GRANTMAKING

Investing in programming to promote positive family interaction

	Strategy	POISE Role	Audience(s)
Strategy 1	Request for proposals: initiatives that promote positive family interactions	Grantmaker	Civic, faith, and nonprofit communities
Strategy 2	Strengthening Black Families interfaith breakfast and discussion: "'Supporting Places for Families to Build and Learn"	Convener	Faith and civic communities
Strategy 3	Request for proposals: organizations providing family support services	Grantmaker	Civic, faith, and nonprofit communities
Strategy 4	Community conversations on the Black family	Catalyst and convener	Black community

Black Families Program Strategy

RESEARCH AND POLICY CHANGE
Advocacy to promote public policy that positively impacts Black families

	Strategy	POISE Role	Audience(s)
Strategy 1	Supporting a scan of local policies that negatively, and disproportionately, impact Black families	Grantmaker and catalyst	Policymakers, nonprofit leaders, and the local philanthropic community
Strategy 2	Strengthening Black Families Forum for Black elected officials in Allegheny County	Co-convener and catalyst	Policymakers, local media, and the local philanthropic community
Strategy 3	Forums about policies impacting Black families	Convener and co-convener	Black community and the general public
Strategy 4	Community conversations on the Black family	Catalyst and convener	Black community

THOUGHT LEADERSHIP
Shifting mindsets regarding the Black family

	Strategy	POISE Role	Audience(s)
Strategy 1	Strengthening Black Families presentation to the Pittsburgh philanthropic community	Convener and catalyst	Local philanthropic community
Strategy 2	Strengthening Black Families Conference	Convener	Local philanthropic and nonprofit communities; nonprofit, community, faith, and civic organizations; the general public
Strategy 3	Engaging artists and cultural leaders to promote positive, diverse images of Black families	Catalyst	Black community and the general public
Strategy 4	Community conversations on the Black family	Catalyst and convener	Black community

Strengthening Black Families

GRANTEE PROGRAM OVERVIEW

Amachi Pittsburgh

Family Strengthening Project Plan looks for ways to naturally enhance existing program activities to support families experiencing parental incarceration. New programming transitions the organization from previously viewing the impacts of parental incarceration on children to treating it as a family issue that impacts everyone. Previous programs promoted mentor-to-child interactions, while new programming expands to a co-partnering model that includes both the mentor and parents, thus providing supports for all family members. Various multi-family recreational activities address common family issues associated with parental incarceration. They also explore ways, as appropriate, to increase family contact and to improve relationships with an incarcerated parent. Activities include, but are not limited to, family strength-building exercises, family goal setting, and the creation of family mission statements that include values and ideals.

The Center that C.A.R.E.S.

Family Time is a family-centered series that engages family members in joint activities. These (1) encourage positive interaction; (2) help family members develop skills that support healthier family relationships and functioning; and (3) improve the quality and quantity of family time. Families are invited to participate in at least six two-hour weekly sessions, which focus on family togetherness, unity, and sharing. C.A.R.E.S. encourages the participation of multiple generations; families are permitted and encouraged to self-define their own family units. The goals are to help each family establish its family identity, and to determine how that identity dictates their interactions with each other and the broader community. During each session, new themes are added to the concept of "Let's _____ together" (e.g., move, connect, plan, play, serve, share, etc.). This encourages the normative behavior of a family doing activities together as one unit.
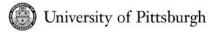
Melting Pot Ministries

Family Matters is a series of psycho-education and psychodrama sessions offered to families. Psychodrama allows participants to use dramatic role play to gain insight into their family interactions. This is an initiative of the Family Konnections program, which is Melting Pot's comprehensive strategy for increasing parental involvement in their children's lives. Families explore topics related to healthier communication—e.g., tenderness and compassion, stress management, coping, and narrative reframing. During the series, families create a family communication tool kit and, at the end, celebrate their accomplishments in a multi-family group outing. Recent changes include inviting parents into the program and doing home visits, in order to work with families in their natural environments.

University of Pittsburgh School of Medicine, Department of Family Medicine

Teen Mother, Young Father Program is a new psycho-educational family component of the Maikuru Teen Pregnancy Prevention Program. Its aim is to incorporate young fathers into already-established activities for teen mothers. This encourages parents to improve communication and problem-solving skills, and helps empower them in making decisions and in interacting with the people and systems around them. In group sessions under the guidance of experienced facilitators, teen mothers and young fathers discuss personal dilemmas and solve problems. Young mothers and fathers are assigned tasks, based on group-session discussions, to practice after each session. Fathers enrolled in the program are invited to participate in three male-only group sessions before joining the group sessions with the teen mothers.

Strengthening Black Families

GRANTEE PROGRAM OVERVIEW

[i] See Appendix A:Summary of Recommendations for grantmaking to strengthen Black Families for a summary of the environmental scan.

[ii] e.g. ,Trayvon Martin, John Crawford, Jonathan Ferrell, Michael Brown, Eric Garner, Jordan Davis, and Tamar Rice.

[iii] 55% of shooting homicide victims are Black (Pew Research & Social Demographic Trends, 2013; http://www.pewresearch.org/daily-number/blacks-suffer-disproportionate-share-of-firearm-homicide-deaths/)

[iv] U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics (November 2014), http://www.bls.gov/news.release/empsit.t02.htm

[v] African Americans in Pittsburgh: The Data in Black & White (2013) http://www.pittsburghquarterly.com/index.php/Regional-Indicators/african-americans-in-pittsburgh-the-data-in-black-white.html

[vi] Children's Defense Fund, State of Black Children's Report (2014)-- http://www.childrensdefense.org/child-research-data-publications/state-of-americas-children/data-tables.html

[vii] http://www.post-gazette.com/opinion/editorials/2014/05/19/Graduation-gains/stories/201405100002

[viii] http://rt.com/usa/incarceration-african-black-prison-606/

[ix] 32% of Black children live in two-parent families (Kids Count Data, http://www.aecf.org/m/resourcedoc/AECF-RaceforResults-2014.pdf)

[x] Where Do We Go from Here? Philanthropic Support for Black Men and Boys, http://www.opensocietyfoundations.org/sites/default/files/philanthropic-support-black-men-and-boys-20140721.pdf

[xi] Erickson, M. F. & Louv, R. (2002). "The Family Re-Union Initiative: A Springboard for Family Centered Community Building, Locally and Nationally." Family Process, 41 (4). 569-578

[xii] i.e., solutions that navigate or manage conditions as they exist.

[xiii] Collins Sims, C.M. (2013). "Towards a New Way of Thinking About African American Life in Urban Neighborhoods." (doctoral dissertation) http://conservancy.umn.edu/handle/11299/144458

[xiv] Moynihan, D. P. (1965). The Negro Family: The Case for National Action. Washington, D.C., Office of Policy Planning and Research, U.S. Department of Labor.

[xv] Nurturance and socialization of its members; passing on generational traditions; and providing a sense of belonging and identity.

[xvi] Although designed to work in tandem with and in support of the family, these institutions have, in general, been the generators and sustainers of the social inequalities that Blacks experience.

[xvii] Burton, L., Winn, D.M., Stevenson, H., & Clark, S. L. (2004). "Working with African American Clients: Considering the 'Homeplace' in Marriage and Family Therapy Practices." Journal of Marital and Family Therapy, 30(4), 397-410; hooks, b. (1990). "Homeplace: A Site of Resistance." In Yearning: Race, Gender and Cultural Politics (pp. 41-49). Boston: South End Press.

[xviii] Hill, R. B. (2003). The Strengths of Black Families (2nd Edition). Lanham, Maryland: University Press of America.

[xix] The shift in the U.S. population from rural to urban areas during the period of rapid industrialization.

[xx] Jewell, K. S. (2003). Survival of the African American Family: The Institutional Impact of U.S. Social Policy. Westport, CT: Praeger.

[xxi] "Mutual aid can be described as people with similar experiences helping each other to manage or overcome issues. What it infers is a system where people come together with their peers to build a network of support." (http://www.nta.nhs.uk/uploads/maid-5final.pdf)

[xxii] Billingsley, A. (1968). Black Families in White America. Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall.

[xxiii] Erickson M. F. & Louv, R. (2002). "The Family Re-Union Initiative: A Springboard for Family Centered Community Building, Locally and Nationally." Family Process, 41 (4). 569-578.

[xxiv] Erickson M. F. & Louv, R. (2002). "The Family Re-Union Initiative: A Springboard for Family Centered Community Building, Locally and Nationally. Family Process, 41 (4). 569-578.

[xxv] http://blacklivesmatter.com

Strengthening Black Families — National Advisory Committee

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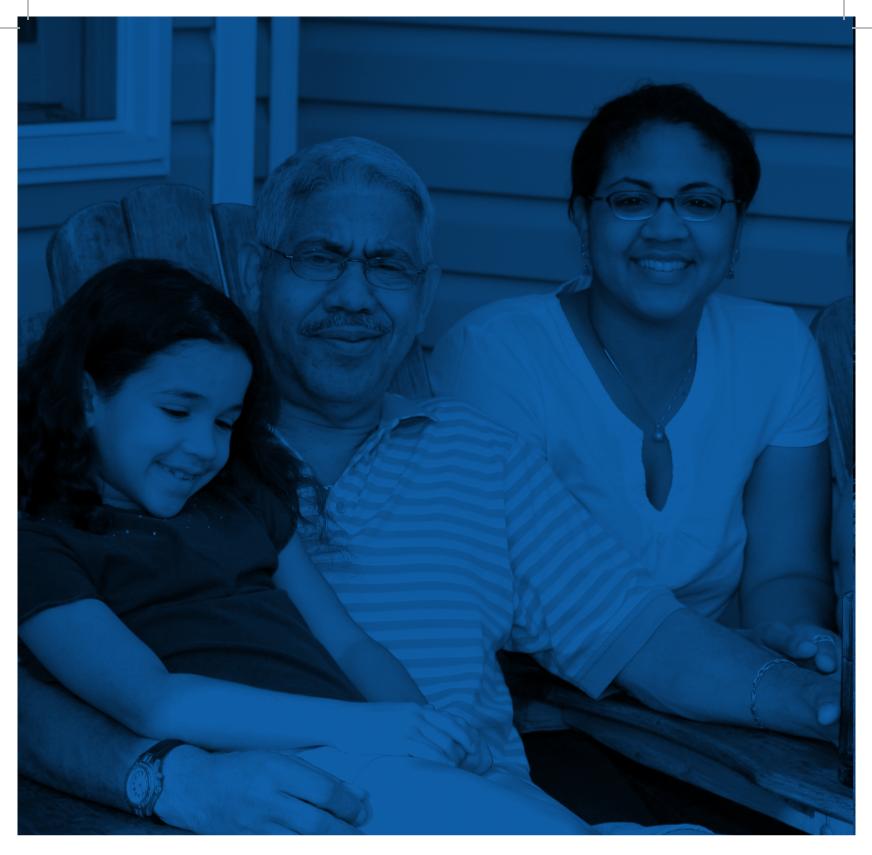
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