



A PARTNERSHIP OF THE
NATIONAL URBAN LEAGUE, INDIANAPOLIS
URBAN LEAGUE & THE AFRICAN AMERICAN
COALITION OF INDIANAPOLIS

EXECUTIVE REPORT



INDIANAPOLIS AFRICAN AMERICAN QUALITY OF LIFE INITIATIVE
A PARTNERSHIP OF THE INDIANAPOLIS URBAN LEAGUE AND
THE AFRICAN AMERICAN COALITION OF INDIANAPOLIS

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INTRODUCTION

The Indianapolis African American Quality of Life Initiative (IAAQLI) is a place-based community change project established through a partnership between the National Urban League, the Indianapolis Urban League, and the African American Coalition of Indianapolis. Funded through a one hundred-million-dollar grant from the Lilly Endowment, the goal of the IAAQLI is to acknowledge the concerns and increase the quality-of-life of African American residents in Indianapolis.

Below is the description of the vision, mission, and goals of the IAAQLI:

Initiative Vision

African Americans in Indianapolis, especially those living in poverty, will have measurable improvements in the quality of their lives that will renew their hope for a better life for themselves and their children.

Initiative Mission

The Indianapolis African American Quality of Life Initiative (IAAQLI) will mobilize the resources and intellectual, spiritual, financial, and emotional energy of African Americans in Marion County. Working collaboratively with other citizens, and key government and philanthropic institutions, the IAAQLI will define and implement actions that create improvements in quality of life for African Americans.

Initiative Goals

- 1** To strategically employ grant funds provided by the Lilly Endowment to make changes in critical issue areas such as health, education, housing, and economic development, where African Americans have measurable disparities as compared to other citizens.
- 2** To convene people and institutions to envision innovative strategies for addressing destabilizing conditions and life-sapping issues such as homicide, decreasing homeownership, and lack of engagement with available health care services.
- 3** To strengthen and address relationship building approaches such as, reintegrating institutionalized citizens into their families and communities, and mending broken relationships and social contracts between African Americans, which work to break social barriers affecting strong family and community life.
- 4** To develop the leadership skills and capacity of all age groups, including churches and community, civic, service, and social organizations.
- 5** To reinvigorate the cultural, spiritual, and value-based foundations of the African American community that have inspired emotional, spiritual, and artistic expression, as well as a sense of identity and self-worth throughout the African American experience.



This report will describe two of the initiative's data gathering processes, the Issue Priority Process (IPP) and the Community Opportunities Assessment (COA). With the assistance of Dr. Karlin J & Associates LLC, the IPP collected sustainable change making priorities from experts in five community issue areas. These experts were charged with determining priorities, which when implemented through strategically targeted grants, could create a measurable and sustainable impact in the quality of life for African Americans living in Indianapolis/Marion County. To fully understand the challenges of the community, the IAAQLI enlisted the help of Engaging Solutions and Black Onyx Management, Inc. to do an in-depth COA. The COA used various methods to gather data and lived experiences of Indianapolis' African American Community. Together, both processes worked to identify areas of concern and priority from diverse perspectives and data sources. The full summative reports for the IPP and COA can be found at www.iaaqli.org.

THE ISSUE PRIORITIZATION PROCESS (IPP)

The IPP data collection process identified a need for expertise in multiple areas to help guide the prioritization of grant-making based on research, identified community needs, and a variety of datasets focused on gaps and needs in African American communities.

As a result, the planning process included identifying and inviting 163 professionals with expertise across five identified pillars; these professionals represented over 150 organizations, roles, and experiences. The experts were organized into issue groups, charged with guiding the strategic alignment of existing and emerging issues within the City of Indianapolis (specifically, Marion County). The experts engaged in multiple facilitated conversations to define 5-7 key changes needed to improve African American quality of life, inducing priority areas for each pillar. Each recommended priority included supportive research and best practices to undergird the recommendations.

1 Business and Entrepreneurship

2 Education

3 Employment

4 Health and Wellness

5 Housing and Homeownership

Together, these pillars represent the key categories of potential initiative investment that could significantly improve the quality of life for African Americans.

PILLARS AND GOALS

The IAAQLI developed the following goals by pillar to undergird its mission and vision. Each goal articulated the intended outcomes of the Initiative and foundation for the Issue Prioritization Process. Major areas of priority were identified for each pillar (See Appendix).

BUSINESS AND ENTREPRENEURSHIP

Increase availability and access to markets, technology, technical assistance, receipt of capital investments, opportunities for idea development, mentorship, and social support systems toward economic growth and sustainability.

EDUCATION

Increase access to and receipt of culturally relevant instruction that is tailored to individual needs of students, which includes highly qualified and highly effective educators, consumable resources, state-of-the-art educational facilities, and social supports for optimal academic and social outcomes.

EMPLOYMENT

Increase access to and receipt of education and comprehensive training for highly skilled and professional positions with equitable livable wage which will have direct implications on upward mobility and self-sufficiency and all its benefits.

HEALTH AND WELLNESS

Increase availability, access to, and receipt of culturally relevant prevention measures, diagnostic and treatment options, equitable health resources, and care services that respond to and improve physical, spiritual, psychological, and emotional longevity in holistically and relationally (personal and interpersonal).

HOUSING AND HOMEOWNERSHIP

Increase access to and receipt of safe and affordable housing, especially for low- and moderate-income individuals and families.

LEADERSHIP AND CIVIC ENGAGEMENT

Increase and maintain a sustained commitment to the development of exemplar organizations, future generations of culturally responsive leaders who are social justice-oriented, civic-minded, equity-driven, and who demonstrate effective interpersonal relationships with knowledge of proper group and organizational processes.

EMERGING THEMES/CONCEPTS ACROSS PILLARS

Emerging Themes/Concepts Across Pillars Inherent in any objective data collection process is the possibility of newly emerging ideas which may confirm or reject a hypothesis. While the process primarily aimed to identify sets of priorities across five (5) categories, themes emerged across the pillars, suggesting the need to include the themes in the Response for Proposals (RFP) process. Listed below are common concepts/themes that emerged, which directly impact the quality of life for African Americans across pillars and without addressing, reducing the potential of strong outcomes for the IAAQLI:

- Theme 1:** Systemic Barriers
- Theme 2:** Information, Education, and Literacy
- Theme 3:** Support and Mentoring
- Theme 4:** Training, Professional Development, and Technical Assistance
- Theme 5:** Collaboration and Partnerships with Existing Innovative and Underfunded Organizations
- Theme 6:** Advocacy and Policy Focus/Commitment to Policy Change towards Racial and Economic Equity
- Theme 7:** Holistic Health (*Access, Services, and Culturally Sensitive Supports*)
- Theme 8:** Capacity Building (*Development of People, Organizations, and Investments*)
- Theme 9:** Access to Capital and Delivery (*Financial, Human, Resources, Skills, Social Networks*)
- Theme 10:** Resource Mapping

Each pillar suggests a primary need to identify, leverage, and invest in existing programs and organizations that are making strides, while simultaneously investing in innovative strategies that have historically been under-funded or previously absent in resolving quality of life issues for African Americans. Experts agree the IAAQLI must be strategic, intentional, and transparent about its efforts and align resources to problem areas with the potential for immediate impact.

THE COMMUNITY OPPORTUNITIES ASSESSMENT (COA)

To gather public input, the Community Opportunities Assessment team (COA team) engaged the community using IAAQLI community ambassadors, community surveys, key informant interviews, focus groups, community leadership meetings, and public meetings. Additionally, the COA team was intentional about engaging Indianapolis' African American youth in a forum that resulted in meaningful input that is included in the COA report. During the COA process, several different outreach methods were used to connect with community members, which is explained in the IAAQLI COA Final Report appendixes. The COA utilized four main engagement tactics to obtain public input. In addition, Cognitech, LLC, a data analytics company, performed a descriptive analysis of twenty-six interviews and 625 open-ended responses to a survey question that was included in the community survey. Cognitech performed three different analyses, including Quality of life rating analysis (number) and its connection to qualitative statements.

The IAAQLI Ambassadors served as an on-the-ground extension of the project objectives. The purpose of the ambassadors was to engage the public (in person and virtually) to obtain feedback from African Americans of various subgroups regarding the challenges/issues they face, their quality of life, investment in their communities, and desired community improvements.

There were eleven ambassadors selected and they were representative of the diverse population of African Americans in Indianapolis/Marion County. Each ambassador was tasked with identifying a target population and side of town they would intentionally reach out to have a representative pool of respondents. The pool of community members touched by the IAAQLI Ambassador program was vast. Throughout the process, the IAAQLI Ambassadors reached 352 community members and sixteen community organizations. The Ambassadors were able to reach African Americans from various socio-economic statuses, ages, genders, educational levels, incomes, lifestyles, etc. During the process, interviewees included, but were not limited to, college and advanced degree recipients, individuals with GEDs, current college students, former felons, community members with substance abuse issues, individuals with a history of homelessness, community members with cognitive and/or physical disabilities, veterans, widows, retirees, divorcees, single parents, business owners, part-time/full-time employees, and community members who are a part of the LGBTQ+ community.

The COA team held five Public Community Meetings during the months of April and May 2021. The invite was shared with over three hundred local/elected government officials, community leaders, neighborhood/resident leaders, grassroots/grass tops organizations and agencies, as well as leaders of organizations in the private sector. A concentrated effort was made to utilize key informants, as well as social media platforms, and websites to spread information regarding the IAAQLI processes and available engagement opportunities. A total of 221 participants attended all five meetings.

SUMMATION OF ENGAGEMENT FINDINGS

Across the various forms of engagement, the feedback was consistent. There were several themes that reoccurred during the community engagements activities. The top five challenges/concerns in the African American community that impact the quality of life of community members were:

1 Safety

2 Education (Early childhood, K-12, after-school enrichment, training programs, etc.)

3 Economic Mobility/ Job Access

4 Food Accessibility

5 Housing

When evaluating the overall data gathered through the assessment, inevitably, the challenges expressed most evidently correlate with an individual's most basic needs. These challenges undeniably impacted the ability of community members to perceive their quality of life positively. When looking at Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs, community members expressed dissatisfaction in their two most basic needs (physiological, and safety). Of the top five challenges expressed by community members, all five fell within the parameter of a basic need.

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CONCLUSION

Nationally, African Americans are disproportionately impacted by social and systemic barriers to economic growth, positive health outcomes, high-quality education and resources, affordable housing to support the creation of long-term wealth, and employment and advancement opportunities. African Americans are over-represented in incarceration, chronic illness, underemployment, homicides, and poverty— persistent and multi-generational national patterns currently reinforced by emerging census data; similarly, in Indianapolis, this trend is reaffirmed. It is well-documented that COVID-19 merely exacerbated systemic and social inequity.

The Lilly Endowment's commitment to begin a strategic investment to improve the quality of life for African Americans in Indianapolis/Marion County is laudable. Indeed, this investment is the beginning of a needed long-term strategy and multi-sector commitment to improving conditions sustainably and unequivocally for African Americans within this community. This beginning will require continued targeted investment from stakeholders across the region. The IAAQLI suggests a need for shared visioning, alignment, and efforts to create this sustainable change—directly benefitting the overall economy for all.

The IPP and COA both collected data that confirms research on the quality of life for African Americans and identifies specific areas of concern in Indianapolis/Marion County. Both initiatives revealed common themes/areas of concern for members of the African American community which related to basic needs such as education, employment, healthcare, and housing. Using this knowledge and expert feedback, both full reports offer specific actionable strategies to respond to these needs. The areas of need and long-term goals are clear; it is now time to invest attention, resources, time, and to proactively and rigorously address policies to support goal attainment to improve the lives of African American citizens in Indianapolis. For the IAAQLI, the charge was to determine and prioritize solutions to well-known challenges.

Findings from this comprehensive process indicate the importance of this funding and the opportunity it creates to significantly impact the quality of life for African Americans in Indianapolis/Marion County.

APPENDIX A

KEY PRIORITY AREAS IDENTIFIED BY PILLAR

Business & Entrepreneurship Pillar

Increase availability, access to, and receipt of capital investments, markets, technical assistance, opportunities for idea incubation, mentorship, and social support systems toward economic growth and sustainability.

KEY PRIORITY AREAS

- 1** Invest in improving access to start-up funding, traditional forms of funding, and an advanced payment plan to enhance cash flow and working capital for Black businesses and Black-led organizations.
- 2** Provide funding to support financial readiness and skills training for Black entrepreneurs and Black-led organizations.
- 3** Invest in improving access to appropriate professional support services including, but not limited to, accounting services, legal services, financial services, human capital management, and marketing.
- 4** Invest in improving access to markets by: a. understanding the most viable industries that will lead to long-term success and profitability, b. gaining access to the right channels and contacts within those industries to do business, and c. access to government contracts & support.
- 5** Provide funding to support an increase in advocates and mentors for Black business leaders and entrepreneurs to aid in developing relationships, help navigate the corporate structure, and aid in early career development, training, and self-advocacy skills.
- 6** Invest in initiatives, programs, and organizations that provide capacity building, including but not limited to, strategy and planning, collaboration.

Education Pillar

Increase access to and receipt of culturally relevant, equitable instruction, highly trained and effective educational structures and resources, and social supports for optimal academic and social outcomes.

KEY PRIORITY AREAS

- 1** Invest in programs, initiatives, and organizations with goals to strengthen the recruitment, Retention, and Quality of Teachers & School Leaders.
- 2** Invest in institutions, programs, and initiatives, which aid in the development of high-quality, academically rigorous, and culturally relevant instructional materials that include meaningful, real-world experiences, to utilize across Marion County schools.
- 3** Invest in programs, organizations, and efforts which aim to increase access to and participation in high quality (as identified by Levels 4 & 5 Paths to Quality) universal Pre-Kindergarten (Pre-K) for Black 3 and 4-year-olds.
- 4** Invest in efforts that aim to strengthen our community to champion and encourage education success through collaboration and partnerships that build tenacity, resiliency, and perseverance.
- 5** Invest in programs, initiatives, and organizations with goals to develop criteria for the identification of policies and practices that strengthen and increase the implementation of culturally responsive school discipline outcomes to support sustained utilization across Marion County schools.
- 6** Invest in programs, initiatives, and organizations with goals to increase high school graduation with credentials that lead to postsecondary access and matriculation through the participation in and completion of programs that provide support (i.e., 21st Century Scholars, FAFSA, etc.).

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KEY PRIORITY AREAS IDENTIFIED BY PILLAR

Employment Pillar

Increase access to and receipt of education and comprehensive training for highly skilled positions, and equitable livable wage professional opportunities with direct implications on upward mobility and self-sufficiency and all its benefits.

KEY PRIORITY AREAS

- 1** Strategically invest in and contribute to campaigns, which aim to address the overarching, root cause issue of Racism/Racial discrimination/Racial bias separately and in the context of all priorities across pillars.
- 2** Invest in programs, initiatives, and organizations with goals to address employees' mental health resulting from community trauma and adverse childhood experiences (ACEs) which may lead to low emotional intelligence and experiencing triggers making it difficult to resolve conflict.
- 3** Invest in programs, initiatives, and organizations with goals to address employees' basic needs, including Transportation, Housing, Food, Finances/Financial Education, Childcare, and Children's Educational Support.
- 4** Invest in programs, initiatives, and organizations with goals to address the large proportion of potential employees who have justice-involved backgrounds including arrests and convictions that may show up on a background check. Where opportunities for traditional employment do not exist, provide people with a path to entrepreneurship.
- 5** Invest in programs, initiatives, and organizations with goals to address the need for both skills-based training and critical thinking education, while also connecting people to employment resources, pathways and exposure to new career options including automation. Assist individuals who have been out of the workforce or faced with a layoff with help to complete an online job application and interview preparation.
- 6** Invest in programs, initiatives, and organizations with goals to address the social capital deficit that many black employees face by identifying formal and informal mentors, sponsors and role models who may support employees' growth.

Health and Wellness Pillar

Increase availability, access to, and receipt of culturally relevant prevention, diagnostic, and treatment options, equitable resources, and care services that respond to and improve physical, spiritual, psychological, and emotional longevity in holistic health and relational (personal and interpersonal) outcomes.

KEY PRIORITY AREAS

- 1** Invest in programs, initiatives, and organizations with goals to improve mental health and reduce trauma and substance use disorder (SUD) for Blacks: Diagnosed and undiagnosed mental health issues exacerbated by community and historical trauma, which is frequently associated with substance use.
- 2** Invest in programs, initiatives, and organizations with goals to address food sovereignty, justice, and access: Black communities should have both access to traditional stores as well as the ability to grow and sustain their own food and related businesses.
- 3** Invest in programs, initiatives, and organizations with goals to reduce chronic disease and related health behaviors: Long-term health issues, such as heart disease, cancer, obesity, and diabetes that are largely driven by lack of physical activity and inadequate nutrition.
- 4** Invest in programs, initiatives, and organizations with goals to reduce infant and maternal mortality: (Typically preventable) deaths among pregnant and postpartum Black women and their fetuses or infants (< 1-year-old).

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KEY PRIORITY AREAS IDENTIFIED BY PILLAR

Housing and Home Ownership Pillar

Increase access to and receipt of safe and affordable housing, especially for low- and moderate-income individuals and families.

KEY PRIORITY AREAS

Invest and fund initiatives and efforts which aim to provide owner Occupied Home Repair grants and financing to support current owners in Black neighborhoods to maintain home value over time, supporting wealth building, especially in gentrifying Black Neighborhoods.

- 1** Invest in the development of specific products to address the lack of Equity funding, Predevelopment funding, and Gap financing for African American led Real Estate Developers.
- 2** Invest in the creation of a Resource Portal that increases awareness of existing resources, strategies to overcome wealth-building barriers for individuals and families. Increase financial, educational, and structural support to assist them in steps to complete various wealth-building and financial stabilizing transactions.
- 3** Invest in and/or develop a capacity-building initiative for CDC 's/CBO 's engaged in housing development.
- 4** Seek to contribute to the design, convening, and institutionalization of a collaborative to pursue and respond to national and private funding opportunities to assist in housing delivery access.

IAAQLI

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