



Since 1926, the Minneapolis Urban League (MUL) has been a beacon of hope and opportunity for the Twin-Cities. With a spirit of excellence, the MUL strives to execute human development programming that provides solutions for African Americans and other people of color. Community leaders who converged in 1926 to form the MUL did so in response to both the societal challenges and emerging opportunities that existed at the time. Some 84 years later, the legacy of MUL is without question noteworthy, and truly reflects this community's commitment to uplifting its citizenry; expanding the quality of life for all, while remaining intently focused on actionable solutions that reflect the mission of the Urban League nationwide.

### **Solutions**

The Gateway is comprised of four intersections: College Preparedness/Career Development, Workforce Solutions, Health and Wellness, and Wealth Accumulation. Each Gateway intersection has been designed to be a solution to some of the most pressing disparities facing African Americans in the Twin Cities; therefore each is critical to the quality of life for youth and adults. Critical to the solutions are community members, corporations, foundations, and other champions.

Several components of the Gateway to Opportunity strategic plan are now in effect, so as we begin our work towards meeting our goals and objectives, we'd like to present glimpses of the challenge before us. Over the next few weeks we will further explain the strategies that each of our intersections will employ to change lives in the Twin Cities.

### *Gateway Glimpses*

#### **The College Preparedness/Career Development Intersection**

Without intervention, the Twin-Cities will indeed become the tale of two cities, with stark differences between the inner city and the suburbs, and glaring disparities between ethnic and income groups. For example, in the report, *Minding the Gap: Reducing Disparities to Improve*

## Creating solutions that unlock possibilities

Written by Scott Gray, MUL President/CEO  
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Regional Competitiveness in the Twin Cities , it is noted that 33% of residents have a Bachelors degree or higher, while only 19% of African Americans hold degrees. The gap between educational attainment and income further indicates that amongst all individuals who earned \$17,500 or less, only 26% had a college degree. In contrast, 53% of adults with salaries ranging from \$35,000 to \$79,999 have a college degree.

The pipeline to postsecondary education is slow, as revealed by The Minnesota Department of Education's 2008 Graduation Indicators, which indicates that just 43.41% of African American students graduate in four years; increasing to 49.14% in five years, and 50.73% in six years. Secondary and some level of postsecondary education are critical if one is to fully participate in today's world of work. This evident brain-drain and wasted potential must be transformed into a purposeful brain gain.

The College Preparedness/Career Development Intersection, through the development of an MUL Career Development Curriculum, will prepare students academically and socially for creating career pathways that offer desired personal and professional success.

### The Workforce Solutions Intersection

According to Minnesota Compass' "proportion of adults working" data, a measure of labor force participation, including those who are not looking for work, roughly 59% of African Americans are working, suggesting that some 41% are not active in the state's labor force. The US Department of Labor reports that 75% of all jobs require some level of postsecondary education, whether a certificate or diploma program. Workforce development, education and training must be better aligned to fulfill employer and marketplace demands.

In the enGauge 21st Century Skills report, four skill clusters are identified as vital to being successful in today's workplace. They are: **Digital-age Literacy**, the technology competencies expected in a 21st century workplace;

#### **Inventive Thinking**,

the ability to think beyond the box;

#### **Effective Communication**

, the ability to clearly communicate with varied audiences; and

#### **High Productivity**

, a growing requirement that workers be self-motivated - contributing to the overall success and mission of the 21st Century workplace.

To respond to these paradigm shifts, the MUL, through its BIG STEP employment and training programs, is devising employer-driven training programs that will prepare individuals to meet the specific needs of employers just-in-time. Through MUL partnerships with business and trade unions, participants of MUL customized training initiatives will be poised to fill positions in highway construction, the burgeoning green sector, and other emerging occupational sectors based upon demand.

The Workforce Solutions Intersection, based upon labor market trends and sectoral demand, will provide job seekers, whether entry-level or re-careering, with industry-recognized training

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that meets employer needs.

### **The Health and Wellness Intersection**

It goes without saying, in the absence of good health and personal wellness, one's ability to achieve personal and career goals is compromised. Life expectancy for African Americans is lower than the general population, and the risk for lifestyle diseases like diabetes, hypertension, and coronary related illnesses is higher according to the Centers for Disease Control. The MUL Health and Wellness Intersection will offer the community an array of nutrition, fitness, preventive and health screenings in support of healthy youth and adults.

### **The Wealth Accumulation Intersection**

Learning to create generational wealth can eradicate poverty in families and communities. Enhancing one's understanding of basic finances, budgeting, home ownership, debt reduction, and savings can lift an individual, and ultimately a family out of poverty. Currently, net assets for African Americans in Minnesota average \$5,000, 17 times less than that of whites; and while 77% of Minnesotans own their homes, only 32% of African Americans own a home. The MUL Wealth Accumulation Intersection will provide myriad informational programs designed to equip the communities it serves with strategies to create personalized goals and pathways to greater financial stability.

The MUL is elated as it embarks on this journey to significantly expand the impact of its programs, strategically offering programmatic initiatives that proactively address root causes that lead to unrealized potential for youth and adults across the Twin-Cities. Honoring a historical legacy - and in that same tradition which served as a catalyst for the initial formation of MUL - the Gateway to Opportunity provides viable solutions and unlocks the promise of possibilities for this community.

Join us on the MUL Gateway to Opportunity. We believe in this plan for uplifting our citizenry, but we know it only works with your support. Without the community, strategic partners, foundation support, and corporate support, this plan might as well sit on the shelf. Bill Gates said "*I believe that if you show people the problems and you show them the solutions they will be moved to act.*" There are many ways to get involved. Contact us at [info@mul.org](mailto:info@mul.org) to find out how. Embrace this new strategic direction. Embrace your power to drive change and take action today.