

Young Men's Initiative

Nan Astone, Michael Katz, and Julia Gelatt
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The New York City Young Men's Initiative—a multiagency, cross-program effort—is dedicated to reducing the inequities in adult success between young men of color (blacks and Latinos) and other young people in New York City. Its mission is “transforming lives by connecting young men of color with the tools they need to succeed.” The Young Men's Initiative (YMI) seeks to expand existing programs and institute new programs in the areas of education, employment, health, and justice—the domains containing the greatest, most critical inequities.

YMI has succeeded in both bringing the inequities between young black and Latino men and other young people in the city to city agencies' full attention and ensuring that policies and programs targeted specifically at this group are a priority citywide. The scope of the initiative is broad, encompassing the work of 20 city agencies and over 100 community-based organizations. YMI's tools include leadership at the highest levels of city government, the devotion of resources to centralized coordination, an emphasis on mentoring, and an insistence that the environments in which young men of color are served are welcoming to them. It provides a model for other cities to harness the enormous human resources of their young male citizens of color toward the end of just economic progress for all.

This brief is based on interviews with a small number of current and past staff members of YMI, current and past members of the Bloomberg administration, YMI advisory board members, materials provided to us by staff, and publicly available sources.

Context

Table 1 illustrates the inequities between young men of color and young white men in New York City. Young black and Latino men also have a weak support system of mentors to help them overcome life's hurdles. For example, 54 percent of young black men younger than 18 in New York City live in households without fathers; the percentage for Latino young men is 43 percent. The analogous percentage for young white men is 11 percent. Less than 5 percent of the teachers of color in NYC public schools are men, compared with 15 percent of white teachers (Banks and Oliveira 2011).

Table 1. Indicators of Education, Employment, Health and Criminal Justice Status by Race and Ethnicity in New York City (percent)

	Black	Latino	White
Men age 16–24 without high school diplomas	32	43	13
Young people age 18–24 neither in school nor working	38	34	17
Men age 18–24 who report frequent mental distress	12	11	6
Juvenile justice admissions	59	25	4

Sources: Data on young people neither in school nor working from City of New York, Office of the Mayor (2011). All other data from Banks and Oliveira (2011).

Policy Response

As a response to these inequities, Mayor Bloomberg announced the creation of the Young Men’s Initiative in August 2011. The following sections briefly outline the history of the implementation of the initiative, and then provide more detail on its components.

History

In his 2010 State of the City address Mayor Bloomberg asked: “How do we connect black and Hispanic young people—especially young men—to the opportunities and support that can lead them to success and allow them to participate in our recovery?”

To begin to answer this question, the Mayor commissioned a report on the needs of young black and Latino men in New York, co-written by David Banks (President of Eagle Academy Foundation) and Ana Oliveira (President of the New York Women’s Foundation) with the collaboration of Chancellor Walcott of the Department of Education (DOE) and Deputy Mayor Linda Gibbs.

After nine months of data collection and analysis the authors summarized the lessons learned as follows:

- young men of color were “too often invisible” in the policy and practice of NYC agencies;
- strategies to redress inequity need to be targeted to young men of color;
- efforts to redress inequity must be collaborative across agency siloes; and
- steps to associate masculinity with positive outcomes must be taken.

What followed over the subsequent nine months was the envisioning by Banks, Oliveira, and their team of what an initiative based on these lessons would look like. They recommended five steps to redress the inequities between young men of color and other young men in New York City:

1. closing the achievement gap in schools;
2. reducing barriers to employment;
3. breaking the cycle of premature and uninvolved fathering by connecting young men to health resources;
4. connecting young men to mentors; and
5. reforming the juvenile and criminal justice systems to prepare involved young men for second chances.

The vision included placing high priority on ensuring that agencies provided services that were culturally and gender competent so young men of color would feel welcomed and comfortable.

YMI was the means to taking these five steps. The city invested over \$20 million annually in city tax levies, and additional support came from private funding through Bloomberg Philanthropies and the Open Society Foundations (OSF).¹ The public/private partnership reflects one of the premises of YMI which is that the crisis of young men of color must be addressed in an effort that cuts across public and private stakeholders and siloes of effort within the public and private sectors.

Structure

YMI is jointly managed by its own backbone organization² and the Center for Economic Opportunity (CEO). Another key part of the YMI team is the Center for Innovation through Data Intelligence (CIDI). All three entities are part of the Mayor’s Office. For YMI, CIDI produces and reports tracking data related to racial and ethnic inequities from 2002 to present, including the disparity index, which is a method of calculating the “rate of an event for young men of color” compared with white young men for each YMI indicator. For

example, CIDI calculates how the misdemeanor arrest rate for young men of color compares to the rate for young white men.³ These three offices worked collaboratively and convened monthly with the mayor to provide reports on progress of all programs and policies. For example, an emphasis on mentoring crosses many YMI programs, and CEO and YMI together are tracking how different approaches to mentoring (e.g., individual versus group) are working and for what outcomes.

An advisory board, comprising experienced and influential leaders from the nonprofit, public, private, and philanthropic sectors, provides input and guidance on the implementation of YMI programs, the evaluation of YMI activities, and the communication strategy for external stakeholders. Using their knowledge and experience in many different fields, the YMI advisory board works closely with the YMI management team to help guide the initiative by sharing their expertise and meeting with key players to help shape and influence policy. For example, board members with expertise in education spearheaded the effort to hold numerous meetings with teachers, principals, and administrators in order to contribute to discipline policy reforms in New York City's school system. Similarly, one source said that YMI advisory board members "urged the passage of the Close to Home Bill in 2012" (NYC Young Men's Initiative 2012a, 9).

In order to ensure a youth voice as part of YMI structure, the mayor has focused on developing informed and active young leaders. The Mayor's Leadership Council is a group of young people who provide important feedback from the point of view of those served. Young people who serve on the committee receive leadership training and serve as youth ambassadors of YMI.

The OSF, a key funder of YMI, also monitors specific programs in which it invests, including the CUNY Fatherhood Academy, Expanded Success Initiative, and Community Education Pathways to Success.

The YMI has a broad array of programs, which target specific citywide indicators of progress on inequalities. This can be attributed partially to the careful planning of the initiative, participation of over 20 agencies and hundreds of community-based partners, and use of data from CIDI that demonstrates and tracks where the gravest disparities lie between young white men and men of color. The citywide indicators for each focus area include 1) Education: high school male graduation rate, high school male dropout rate, high school male chronic absenteeism; 2) Employment: Out-of-school males age 16–24 who are unemployed; 3) Justice: Felony convictions and unique admissions to jail for males age 16–24; and 4) Health: Firearm deaths, teen pregnancy rates, live teen births (NYC Young Men's Initiative 2012b).

A focus on the details of YMI can obscure what many of our interviewees argue is its overwhelming achievement to date: namely, to raise the fact of gross inequities between young men of color and other young people in New York City to prominence in the public discourse. Interviewees spoke of bringing the situation of young men of color to prominence using superlative adjectives (e.g., "a moral victory" "impactful"). Our interviewees told us that the spirit of YMI is that failure of an individual program will be followed by a search for a successful replacement program and that the success of an individual program will be followed by scale-up and serve as a catalyst for more innovation.

When asked for exemplars of YMI's programming, the agreement among our interviewees on the specific programs and policies that stand out as especially promising and exciting was remarkable. The next sections describe these specific programs, policies, and related activities.

Table 2. Details of Selected YMI Programs

Program name	Focus	Number of New Yorkers served	Funding amount	Funding source
Expanded Success Initiative	Education	40 schools; over 3,260 young men of color served in FY13.	Each school receives \$250,000 over 2.5 years	Open Society Foundation (OSF)
Jobs-Plus	Employment	23 NYCHA developments; expected to place 4,400 residents in jobs over the next 3 years. 1,270 placed in jobs in FY13.	\$30 million over 3 years after \$24 million expansion in 2013	City tax levy (public dollars)
CUNY Fatherhood Academy	Health	113 participants in FY12 and FY13.		OSF and city tax levy
Arches	Justice	580 participants served in FY13	\$4.7 million annually	Bloomberg
Community Education Pathways to Success (CEPS)	Justice	74 participants served in FY13	\$1 million annually	OSF

Sources: Expanded Success Initiative data from “Agencies Working Together: Young Men’s Initiative,” Mayor’s Management Report, Mayor’s Office of Operations, accessed January 29, 2014, <https://nycopendata.socrata.com/report/mmr/young-mens-initiative>; Jobs-Plus data from “Mayor Bloomberg Announces \$24 Million Expansion of Jobs-Plus Program to New York City Housing Authority Residents in All Five Boroughs.” Office of the Mayor, press release, October 18, 2013, http://www.nyc.gov/html/hra/downloads/pdf/news/press_releases/2013/pr_october_2013/jobs_plus_press_release.pdf; CUNY Fatherhood Academy data from Young Men’s Initiative (2012b).

Expanded Success Initiative

The Expanded Success Initiative (ESI) is a DOE program. It began in August 2012 and has three components. First, DOE invested resources in 40 schools that already had relatively high graduation rates for young men of color. These schools serve over 11,000 young men of color and had, before the initiation of ESI, an average graduation rate among young men of color of 72 percent, which is very close to the rate for whites (74 percent). Second, ESI will develop a new school model geared toward increasing school completion and college readiness among young men of color, based on successful strategies in ESI schools. Third, this model will be evaluated and incorporated into schools citywide.

Interviewees reported that key components of the programs at ESI schools are academic rigor, youth engagement, and school culture hospitable to young men of color. There was a competition to identify the participating schools, and one proposal requirement was including young men from the schools as part of the proposal team.

The ESI received substantial support from the OSF, which monitors the initiative’s operations quite closely. This monitoring consists of a collaborative, rather than a transactional, partnership between OSF and ESI in which regular meetings were held among people from OSF, people involved in ESI directly, and people from DOE.

ESI is designing a breakthrough high school model with the participation of ESI design fellows (professionals and potential new school leaders). The plan is to launch eight new high schools that pilot this design in fall 2014.

Jobs-Plus

Jobs-Plus is a place-based jobs program developed by the US Department of Housing and Urban Development in the 1990s that has been shown to successfully increase participants’ earnings (Bloom et al. (2005). It provides employment services, rent assistance, financial counseling, and community support for work, all located within a public housing development.

CEO set up a pilot Jobs-Plus program at Jefferson Houses in 2009, using tax levies in partnership with the City University of New York (CUNY). CEO and the Mayor's Fund to Advance New York received a Social Innovation Fund grant from the Corporation for National and Community Services, which was used to replicate Jobs-Plus in New York City (as well as San Antonio; see NYC Young Men's Initiative 2012b).

Based on the success of these pilots, particularly for young men, YMI has invested \$8 million annually over three years (\$24 million total) to expand Jobs-Plus, which will now provide services to public housing residents in all five boroughs at 20 NYCHA developments.

The Jobs-Plus program involves the Human Resources Administration (HRA), the NYC Housing Authority (NYCHA), CEO, YMI, and CUNY. Interviewees reported that the collaboration between NYCHA and the HRA was new and an exemplar of the cross-agency collaboration that defines YMI.

CUNY Fatherhood Academy

The CUNY Fatherhood Academy is a 16-week program at LaGuardia Community College, supported by OSF. Although the idea for the Academy predated YMI, it was incorporated into the initiative because it addresses some of the same goals. It targets 18- to 24-year-old fathers for a program that combines GED classes, parenting programs, and work experience through internships. Although housed at LaGuardia Community College, it draws in young fathers from across New York City. The program has had some success in young fathers passing the GED exam and enrolling in college, although the numbers served by the program are small. The program is currently undergoing a qualitative evaluation by the Urban Institute.

Neighborhood Opportunity Networks and Other Justice Programs

Neighborhood Opportunity Networks (NeON) are "community-based Department of Probation (DOP) offices that work with a network[s] of community organizations, government agencies, local businesses, and community residents focused on connecting probation clients who live in the target neighborhood to opportunities, resources and services." They are less a program than a policy directing how DOP does business.

The NeON policy redefines how and where DOP works with probation clients. Research emphasizes that effective intervention entails engaging ongoing support in communities. For this reason, the NeON focuses on networks, client engagement, and community engagement. The two fundamental ideas behind the NeON are the provision of a meaningful presence in the communities where significant number of clients live, and the provision of viable community alternatives to long-term government dependency to those clients.

Most individuals reporting to their probation officer at a NeON are on probation following an adult offense (in New York State, adolescents who are 16 to 18 years old are part of the adult system). Yet the NeON concept meshes well with New York State's Close to Home (CTH) Initiative for youth. CTH transfers authority of youth who are placed out of home by the Family Courts to the NYC Administration for Children's Services; it also expands alternative to placement programs run by the Department of Probation, one of which operates out of the Harlem NeON. One interviewee described the key innovative aspect of NeON as taking an old objective for justice-involved youth—that is, getting them to have an achievement plan that involves using services—and helping them incorporate the resources *available in their own families and communities*. This is much easier when young people who are in custody or confinement are located near those families and communities.

Two notable programs in DOP are Arches and the Community Education Pathways to Success (CEPS). Arches is a mentoring program that uses both individual and group mentoring strategies. Arches serves probation clients between 16 and 24 and is designed to improve participants' attitudes, behavior, and risk-

avoidance skills. CEPS is a literacy program targeted at young adults on probation who have reading skills between the fourth- and eighth-grade levels.

Executive Orders 150 and 151

Two early actions that coincided with the launch of YMI were executive orders by Mayor Bloomberg that addressed issues of great importance to young men of color. Executive Order 150 ordered city agencies to provide information about acquiring government-issued identification and to help people obtain it. This executive order addressed a major barrier to success for young black and Latino men who often did not have the identification needed for job applications, school enrollment and housing applications. It also helps young men of color with their interactions with the police, since a person stopped by police can be sent to jail if she or he does not possess some form of government-issued identification. This is particularly important in the context of the New York Police Department's broad use of the practice known as "stop and frisk," in which police proactively stop, question, and pat down individuals who they perceive as acting suspiciously. Black and Latino men make up the majority of individuals affected by this policy.⁴

Executive Order 151 (dubbed "ban the box") ordered NYC agencies to desist from including questions regarding a person's criminal background on job applications. This executive order removed a barrier to employment with the city that disproportionately affected young black and Latino men due to inequities in criminal justice involvement between them and other young men.

The fact that these orders occurred so early in the rollout of YMI was fortuitous because, as one of our interviewees reported, it gave YMI "two big wins" early on.

Challenges

The official launch of YMI in 2011 received a great deal of publicity. Thereafter, there was much less ongoing communication about the initiative to the public; according to many of our interviewees, this absence of communication was unfortunate. Interviewees suggested reasons this happened. For example, an initiative like YMI takes time to get off the ground, and people are reluctant to communicate about the process of setting up the initiative; they prefer to wait until there are results to tout.

Yet, as we reported above, most of our interviewees believed that the single most important part of YMI was simply bringing the plight of young men of color to prominence and that keeping this in the public eye was an important component of YMI's activities. YMI did this, to varying degrees, within the administration and city agencies, but less so with the general public. Those we interviewed called for a sustained level of public communication about the initiative.

Our interviewees felt that communication with community leaders is critical. While these grassroots leaders are important in their own right, they are also the people most likely to be able to raise awareness of YMI among young men of color, as these leaders often have the most frequent contact and strongest connections with this population.

Of course, some of these people were participants in various programs as grantees. ARCHES, for example, is a community mentoring program for justice-involved young people. Community organizations were invited into developing ARCHES earlier than is typical, and one interviewee reported a great deal of satisfaction with that process. But all community leaders, not just the ones who were involved, could benefit from knowing more about the programs and policies of YMI.

While recognizing that the YMI advisory board was established, in part, to communicate to community leaders and to provide accountability to them, our interviewees felt a wider and more diversified strategy is needed. An exemplar of the type of strategic communication activities our interviewees hope for is the first annual barbecue intended to bring all the stakeholders for YMI together. The event was held in June 2013

under a tent to symbolize the joint efforts from various stakeholders, advisors, agencies, and youth and was a great success.

Another challenge that people spoke about was the necessity to allocate sufficient time for the rollout of programs and policies that require new types of cross-agency cooperation. Working across siloes requires mutual education and patience as procedures are developed and joint activities agreed upon. The positive thing reported to us was that YMI was open to midcourse corrections, which partially compensated for the fact that agencies were not always given enough time to respond as carefully as they might have wanted to the opportunities YMI presented.

Results

Some of the programs and policies that fall under YMI existed before, were in the planning stages, or had other streams of funding. All interviewees agreed, nevertheless, that establishing YMI as an umbrella initiative added value tremendously. By putting out newsletters, preparing for advisory board meetings, and having monthly meetings of key stakeholders, the YMI director's office kept a sense of unity and purpose alive.

YMI sustained attention on the inequities that young black and Latino men experience within the administration and city agencies. This is important because YMI was intended to go beyond the particular programs it sponsored and to focus all city agencies' attention on young black and Latino men as the population relates to the agency mission. For example, people on the advisory board who had experience in education helped the DOE evaluate its disciplinary policies for their impact on young men of color, and changes were made.

Moreover, YMI was intended to inspire youth-serving organizations and adults who work with young people to attend to how their program design meets the needs of young men, how inviting their services are to young men of color, and how competently they serve young men. Our interviewees noted that earlier in the Bloomberg administration there was a portfolio of programs to combat poverty that young African American and Latino men did not participate in to the fullest extent possible. One purpose of YMI is to rectify situations like this.

Second, the umbrella initiative promoted accountability through CEO's monitoring and evaluation, the YMI backbone organization's tracking of process, and the advisory board providing a community perspective.

By all accounts, the goal of interagency cooperation and action outside siloes was achieved to some extent. Examples of this reported to us include the cooperation between the NYCHA and Human Resources on Jobs-Plus, and the joint activities of the Administration for Children's Services with Juvenile Justice on a number of YMI programs.

One reason for the success in fostering collaboration was that YMI got the message across that, for example, reducing inequity in test scores early in life and reducing criminal recidivism later in life were different aspects of the same overall effort. Monthly meetings of the different agencies involved in YMI facilitated this cross-pollination and understanding of common purpose. Of course, the fact that those agencies had access to additional funds helped as well. Monthly meetings with the mayor, and the high priority placed on YMI within the Bloomberg administration, were also key.

This is not to say that cooperation was as widespread as possible or that walls were completely broken down. Interagency cooperation on specific programs appears to have been successful. Change within agencies to make young men of color a priority and to make programs gender and culturally competent

happened but was less widespread. Our interviewees pointed out that institutionalizing change of this kind takes time and leadership, and it needs to be fostered by staff training in gender and cultural competence.

In sum, the existence of the backbone office of YMI itself, the monthly meetings, and the availability of extra funds were crucial to the success of interagency cooperation. Continued cross-agency cooperation and the breakdown of siloes of activity, therefore, depend on the maintenance of these structural supports.

Looking Ahead

Sustain the Effort

YMI should go on and continue to expand. Support from tax levies is ongoing, but concrete plans for long-term sustainability, including the identification of continued private support, should be a high priority.

A public relations campaign, devoted to raising awareness of YMI among neighborhood-level community leaders from nonprofits, government entities, and businesses is a high priority.

Enthusiasm for YMI among community leaders in the places where young men live would substantially improve its success. The existence of the advisory board is a first and important step. The barbecue was another. Next steps might include activities that are local—within communities—rather than citywide. The advisory board is likely a good resource for helping YMI develop strategies to be accountable to local communities. A good example of how a higher awareness of YMI among community leaders might serve well is as a counter-narrative to the discussions of the stop and frisk policy as detrimental to young men of color.

The existence of a backbone organization tasked with coordination, support, and pushing forward the larger vision of YMI, in coordination with CEO and CIDI, is essential to ensure that cross-agency efforts continue and expand.

All our interviewees testified to the benefit of the YMI umbrella, both conceptually and as a coordination of activities. It is important that this backbone organization continue to exist in order to monitor and assist in the implementation of YMI policy and continue to coordinate closely with CEO and CIDI. One important task of such a backbone organization is the promotion of the idea that individual agency missions (e.g., educational success) are part of a larger effort to promote adult success, in addition to important ends in themselves. It is this idea that inspires the breaking down of siloes and interagency cooperation.

Making people and programs gender- and culturally competent should continue to be a priority. This part of YMI's mission should include promotion of gender and cultural competence among people and programs not directly related to or supported by YMI.

A major theme of the Banks/Oliveira report was that young men of color do not feel comfortable or even welcome in many environments where they can find needed services. An important part of YMI's mission should be promoting changes in agencies and people working citywide to rectify this situation. Without such a focus, young men are less likely to take advantage of the services that are available to them.

An important next step for YMI is to begin to tackle the task of integrated data systems for its component programs.

YMI did not include an effort to get the data systems used by the different agencies involved (and programs within agencies) to talk to each other, use common elements, or at least be linked in some fashion. CEO and YMI did provide some agencies with resources to enhance their data collection capacity. While CEO is able to monitor performance in the absence of such a system, a unified or linked system would provide some additional advantages. These would include enhanced abilities to make referrals and the tracking of

individuals who participate in multiple programs. With recognition that a unified system is a large endeavor, some preliminary conversations and brainstorming about this goal would be useful.

Young men should continue being included in program leadership and design.

The Mayor's Youth Leadership Council is an important and successful component that should be maintained. The Leadership Council is made up of 20 high school sophomores and juniors and is focused on building the youth voice, developing leadership skills, and providing training on youth policy and research. These leaders have and will continue to provide YMI with an important voice. Efforts to expand youth participation, particularly at a local and programmatic level, should be made and maintained. The inclusion of youth voices in all aspects of YMI is key to success.

Sufficient strategic planning time should be incorporated into future funding allocations to agencies, so funds can be allocated to the most cost-effective policies, programs, and target populations.

Now that YMI is established, it is an appropriate time for reflection and planning. These activities would facilitate the accomplishment of other goals in these recommendations. A gap analysis to identify programmatic or geographic areas that are not in the current portfolio of programs would be timely. YMI should continue its current practice of being open to midcourse corrections in ongoing programming. To help ensure that resources are being allocated efficiently among programs, there should be a gap analysis to help aid planning and program development for expanding, downsizing, and creating new initiatives.

Some resources should be set aside in order to share YMI as a successful model of intervention to other cities where young men of color experience inequities.

YMI has been successful enough to warrant expansion, which will, be accompanied by enrichment from the experiences of other cities.

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Notes

¹ "Mayor Bloomberg Launches Nation's Most Comprehensive Effort to Tackle Disparities between Young Black and Latino Males and Their Peers," Office of the Mayor, press release, August 4, 2011.

²The term “backbone organization” comes from the scholarly literature on collective impact initiatives and refers to a set of actors or an organization tasked with leadership and coordination across sectors and participants in efforts that involve cross-collaboration (see Kania and Kramer 2011).

³“Young Men’s Initiative,” New York City Center for Innovation through Data Intelligence, accessed January 29 2014, <http://www.nyc.gov/html/cidi/html/research/yymi.shtm>.

⁴“Stop and Frisk Data,” New York Civil Liberties Union, accessed January 29, 2014, <http://www.nyclu.org/content/stop-and-frisk-data>.