



Expanding Economic Opportunity for Young Men and Boys of Color through Employment and Training

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The experience of young men of color with obtaining employment and quality jobs has been negatively influenced by many factors, including persistent discrimination, the hiring practices of employers, geographic and social isolation, substandard secondary education, lack of career and postsecondary educational guidance, inadequate career and technical education, and higher incarceration rates. As a result, young men of color have long suffered from lower earnings and higher unemployment rates than young white men. In the early 1980s, 20- to 24-year-old African American men endured 30 percent unemployment rates, compared with 14 percent for young non-Hispanic white men. While unemployment rates for these groups of young men dropped to 18 and 7 percent in the late 1990s, employment and real earnings of black and Hispanic young men have declined since 2000.¹ These worsening outcomes stem from both the general weakening of the economy and structural shifts in the labor market. At the same time, the skills beyond the high school level demanded and rewarded by employers have increased, while the supply of these skills among most low-income men of color has lagged relative to non-Hispanic white men.

What can be done to turn around these dismal outcomes? A broad solution set is needed, involving multiple institutions in all sectors—government, public institutions, nonprofits, education, and business—and interventions that are targeted at every age and across the economic spectrum. This paper focuses on strategies that show promise for improving the labor market outcomes of *low-income* young men of color, in particular. It does not address the issue of economic disparities for men of color who are older or for those who are not low-income. While a multitude of factors are linked to economic opportunities—such as health, early childhood and elementary school education, criminal justice policies and practices, and community environments—other papers in this series discuss these issues as they relate to improving life outcomes for boys and young men of color.

This paper outlines the elements of an employment-focused approach to improving the economic opportunities and outcomes for low-income boys and young men of color, highlighting potential policy, system, and institutional reforms as well as program investments. Making more than just a dent in the problems facing low-income young men of color requires initiatives that are aimed at enhancing skills of individuals but also systemic reforms that reduce persistent discrimination in hiring and that make secondary, postsecondary, and other institutions more responsive to the labor market and the populations they serve. Such efforts must be directed at not only increasing employment but also raising the quality of jobs, particularly in today's context in which too many men of color are earning low wages. Improving their job outcomes is critical for both the current generation of young men and the stability of the families they form. In turn, healthy relationships and marriage can positively affect the earnings of men of color (Ahituv and Lerman 2007, 2011).

Successful programs and models should be expanded to reach a critical mass of low-income young men of color. Sufficient scale and coordination among all levels of government, the charitable and business sectors, and education and training systems are needed to change the policies and systems that have failed too large a portion of young men of color to date. Among the programs ripe for expansion are models that (1) improve academic, occupational, and basic employability skills in high school; (2) increase access to college and credential attainment; and (3) facilitate transitions to the labor market.

Promising strategies that lack solid evidence of effectiveness should be subject to serious evaluations. Individual programs can help a modest number of people, but they alone cannot address the social and systemic issues. Transforming the economic opportunities and life outcomes for young men of color requires a comprehensive approach involving public policies and systems, skills learned at school and at work, employer practices and perceptions, and the social interactions between schools, intermediaries, and employers. To date, few have successfully taken on this challenge.

The paper begins by briefly exploring the problem, then discusses promising reforms and programs that focus on changing the structure of education and preparing young men for and helping them access job opportunities that will lead to productive careers. The examples provided throughout are not exhaustive, but they illustrate the kinds of solutions that have been pursued and may be worth further expansion and investment. Further detail on each example and the level of evidence supporting the strategy can be found in the appendix. The paper concludes with a discussion of the knowledge gaps and areas for further research.

The Problem

Over the past 15 years, joblessness has increased and earnings have declined among young men of color. By early 2014, the employment rate of 20- to 24-year-old men had fallen to 45 percent among black men and to 68 percent among Hispanic men.² Young American Indian and Alaska Native men are as poorly off as any other racial or ethnic minority, with employment rates about 50 percent. While the increases in overall unemployment and significant structural changes in the labor market have affected broad segments of the workforce, they have exacerbated long-standing problems faced by men of color

in the workforce. These problems include discrimination and discriminatory impacts, as well as broader system and institutional barriers that fail to support educational advancement or address the gaps in the work-related skills of young men of color relative to white non-Hispanic men, and thus limit their access to well-paid jobs and careers.

At the forefront of the issue is persistent discrimination, which has shaped and continues to affect the systems—housing, criminal justice, education, and workforce—that can support or hinder successful educational and employment outcomes for young men of color (Pager and Shepherd 2008). Young men of color tend to live in low-income, racially segregated neighborhoods, driven both by income inequality and housing discrimination (Turner et al. 2013). Their social isolation worsens their job prospects partly by limiting their “social capital” for labor markets. In other words, they often lack connections to individuals who can help them find or secure employment (Granovetter 1995; Spaulding 2005).

American Indians living on reservations may be the most isolated, experiencing both geographic and social isolation. For low-income black men, the issues may be both geographic isolation and the absence of connections to successful employed adult men in their communities. Though Hispanic men tend to have higher employment rates and more connections to jobs than black men, these connections usually extend only to the low-wage labor market (Elliott and Simms 2001). These neighborhood effects include a higher likelihood of attending substandard schools that suffer from lack of funding and concentrations of poor students with high needs, as well as higher rates of crime and chances of arrest. Incarceration of many boys and young men of color for nonviolent drug infractions is excessive relative to other populations, thereby imposing additional burdens on these job-seekers (Lieberman and Fontaine 2015; Holzer, Offner, and Sorenson 2005).

In addition, discriminatory hiring practices by employers continue to impede access to jobs for young men of color. Multiple studies have shown that employers, when presented with résumés of job candidates who are equally qualified, will more likely select applicants with “white sounding” names than those with names associated with blacks, Hispanics, or other ethnic groups (Pager 2007). In one study that used paired résumé testing, black and Hispanic applicants were half as likely to be called back for an interview or receive a job offer than equally qualified white applicants. In fact, black and Hispanic applicants without criminal records fared the same as white applicants who had just been released from prison (Pager, Western, and Bonikowski 2009). This finding suggests that the economic prospects of low-income men of color stem not from disparate levels of skills alone, but from other factors such as discrimination. In addition to discrimination, employers tend to locate far from where minority populations live and to recruit new workers through their current employees. These barriers exacerbate any skill shortfalls facing young men of color and hold back young men of color with all the requisite qualifications.

Discrimination and its residual effects provide important context for understanding the challenges experienced by young men of color in the labor market. Structural changes to the labor market in the past 15 years have also played a role in the economic opportunities of young men of color and have affected less-educated young men of color, especially black men, more than any other group. Today, what employers need and reward with higher compensation (the *demand side*) has changed

dramatically, but the skills and expectations of workers (the *supply side*) have not fully adjusted to those changes. While men of color have generally experienced increasing levels of educational attainment over time, the work-related skills of young men of color has lagged behind the skills of other groups.

Some boys and young men—especially African Americans—fall behind at a very early age. Contributing to the education gaps are such factors as higher rates of disciplinary action in school (even at very early ages), lower expectations from teachers, and disproportionate assignment to special education tracks (Boser, Wilhelm, and Hanna 2014; Harry and Klingner 2014; US Department of Education 2014). When they get to high school, black and Hispanic boys often have a harder time completing school and often take longer to do so than white students. Higher dropout rates and difficulty finding jobs mean that they frequently become disconnected from both work and school. Hispanic boys do not fall behind as early, but they often drop out of high school to take low-wage jobs, which may benefit them and their family in the short term but not the long term. By the time they enter the workforce, both black and Hispanic young men score far below whites on various academic achievement and literacy tests (Edelman, Holzer, and Offner 2006). Communication, teamwork, problem-solving, responsibility, and reliability are also critical skills for success in the job market. Unfortunately, the inability to secure well-structured work experience in their teen years limits the opportunity for many young men of color to refine these skills, which are learned first at home and in communities, then built upon through early workplace learning.

The employment problems faced by low-income boys and men of color reflect not only a skills mismatch but also an adult education system that is inadequate for addressing these gaps or building the necessary academic skills for further education. Not only are funding levels low (and declining), especially for addressing severe skill deficits, but programs are of uneven quality and poorly aligned with the requirements for postsecondary education and employment. The heavy emphasis on General Education Development (GED) programs may be misplaced, given that individuals who pass the GED test are no better off in the labor market than those who fail to complete high school and do not earn a GED (Heckman and Kautz 2014).

Low-income young men of color often face additional financial burdens that limit their opportunities for success in the labor market. For example, former college students can face the need to repay student loans (Baum and Steele 2010). Student loan debt disproportionately affects students of color, who have higher rates of loan default because they often have to take out more loans, are more likely to be unemployed or low-income, and are more likely to attend for-profit institutions, which account for half of loan defaults.³ Student loan debt can affect the ability of young men of color to obtain future financing for college and their ability to enroll in low-cost, public education and training programs.

Child support is another financial burden faced by many low-income men of color that can interfere with success in the labor market. One challenge is that the amount of child support orders may be inconsistent with low-income men's ability to pay and is often not adjusted when these men become unemployed. As a result, they build up arrearages. For a substantial share of these fathers, a large percentage of the arrearage is owed to the state, not the custodial parent and child. An unemployed noncustodial father who has child support arrears may determine that it is more beneficial for the well-

being of his children to work informally, and thus not be subject to child support “taxes” on his earnings (Holzer, Offner, and Sorenson 2005).⁴ At the very worst, noncustodial fathers with child support arrears may face imprisonment, which can impact their ability to work. Because young men of color have higher rates of nonresident fatherhood, they are more likely to be subject to these penalties.

Because of these barriers, making significant progress toward improved employment and earnings outcomes for young low-income men of color will require a comprehensive approach. Policy initiatives must address systemic forces as well as individual skill-building. Though this paper addresses some of the systemic forces at play, it focuses on reforming systems and expanding promising programs that aim to help low-income men of color build skills and access higher-wage jobs as one way to achieve economic success.

The Solutions

Facilitating the success of low-income young men of color in the workforce requires addressing the systemic and institutional challenges these men face as well as building their human and social capital. First, we consider ways of reducing the institutional and systemic barriers to employment success. Approaches that aim to overcome discrimination in hiring are key, as is exploration of efforts to limit employer hiring practices that disadvantage young men of color in the labor market. Schools and other institutions vital to the success of young men of color can adopt reforms to raise men’s skills so they can succeed in the labor market. Examples include changing high schools to expand career counseling and information, to increase opportunities for apprenticeship and career-technical education, and to broaden access to science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM) education and careers.

Beyond systems reforms to help men of color build skills, improvements are needed in the transitions from education and training to the labor market. Stronger links are needed among the various institutions that aim to build men of color’s skills so participants are trained for real jobs and careers. Better integration of the workforce and higher education systems would help bridge the divide. Community colleges and other institutions of higher education also need to become more flexible, inclusive, and responsive to the needs of men of color, including creating a sense of “belonging” for students who may be the first in their families to go to college or may perceive themselves as not fitting in. Community and faith-based organizations can help postsecondary institutions achieve these goals because of their connections to and knowledge of the needs of young men of color. Access to postsecondary education and careers can be further enhanced by reforming the Pell grant system to allow for greater career guidance and support, which is essential given the mainstream isolation experienced by many men of color.

Programmatic solutions should accompany systems and institutional reforms to ensure the long-run success of young men of color. Many effective or promising programs that serve young men of color—whether aimed at improving low-basic skills, success in college, or transitions to the labor market—are small or only “one-shot” efforts; such programs should be enhanced, expanded, and replicated. Programs with strong links to employers have been successful, but further work is needed to

see how to make these strategies work best for low-income young men of color. Long-standing programs serving low-income young people, such as Job Corps and the Summer Youth Employment Program, should be improved to better serve men of color. In addition, programs should be expanded that have shown promise in facilitating positive outcomes for young men of color who face challenges in the labor market due to child support or because they have been caught up in the criminal justice system. Finally, initiatives to enhance the quality of jobs held by low-wage workers should be pursued and evaluated. Steps that encourage employers to offer regular hours and benefits develop career ladders, and pay higher wages can substantially improve the economic well-being and working conditions of men of color.

Together, systems and institutional reforms combined with enhancing specific programs can improve postsecondary education and employment outcomes for men of color. Below, we describe several approaches that should be considered when developing a broad-based strategic investment.

System and Institutional Changes to Improve Employment Opportunities for Young Men of Color

Institutional changes can reduce employment barriers for young men of color, especially when institutions within and across systems (i.e., the education and workforce systems) find ways to collaborate to serve low-income individuals and reduce barriers to success. Discrimination by private actors in the labor market and the discriminatory impacts of government policies represent a major challenge for young men of color that can be addressed at the systems or institutional level. Overcoming these barriers is necessary but not sufficient for them to thrive. In addition, reforming secondary and postsecondary institutions and community and faith-based organizations are critical steps to help young men of color succeed in education and training and connect them with rewarding career opportunities.

We begin with a discussion of discrimination in the labor market. Next, we highlight *policy changes and system innovations* that education and training institutions could implement to improve the employment and economic security of young men of color.

Addressing Discrimination

While adequate skill development is essential, improving career outcomes for young men of color requires tackling discrimination by employers. Employers may discriminate against young men of color because they are racially biased or because they believe that race is a proxy for poor employment capabilities (sometimes called statistical discrimination). Employers and other institutions may adopt unfair practices relating to criminal records, credit reports, or work histories that disproportionately harm young men of color, who are more often caught up in these situations than other youth. While a full examination of the important and complex issue of discrimination in hiring is outside the scope of

this paper, we discuss it briefly here and highlight some potential new regulatory approaches that are aimed at addressing certain hiring practices that disproportionately affect young men of color.⁵

COMBATTING DISCRIMINATION BASED ON RACE AND ETHNICITY

Direct enforcement and improvement of anti-discrimination laws is essential to address discrimination based solely on race and ethnicity. As a part of this enforcement, employers who have government contracts could and should be held to standards of nondiscrimination through the Office of Federal Contract Compliance Programs (OFCCP) and any parallel state and local statutes or regulations. Moreover, the OFCCP regulations governing anti-discrimination policies could be updated to be more pertinent to current economic situations and labor force demographics. As government contractors represent only a portion of employers, broader strategies are also needed to address discrimination, including the use of government testers to ferret out employers who are in violation of federal laws and more systematic review of data from employers who are not federal contractors.⁶ For employers who discriminate for statistical reasons, improved information about specific individuals, such as workforce portfolios, could reduce the scale of the problem. The public workforce system could also play a role in overcoming hiring differentials based on employment networks, which might contribute to employers giving preference to white applicants over those who come from particular racial or ethnic groups.

REGULATING FAIR USE OF CRIMINAL RECORDS

Because of mass incarceration in the United States, particularly of African American and Latino males, forcing applicants to report criminal records creates an employment barrier for disadvantaged young men of color (Neal and Armin 2014). The requirement to disclose criminal records is often not limited to conviction histories and can include asking applicants to report on arrests even if the applicant was not convicted of a crime. Further, employers often check public records on criminal convictions without the applicant's knowledge, including accessing juvenile records when an applicant has not requested that his record be expunged. Despite Equal Employment Opportunity Guidance aimed at limiting the use of arrest records⁷ and conviction histories often not being related to the work to be performed, these employer practices continue (Todman et al. 2013). Their actual effects on employment are also somewhat unclear; there is evidence that some background checks can help *reduce* discrimination against black men who do not have criminal records (Holzer, Raphael, and Stoll 2006). This mixed evidence suggests the need to consider carefully how such laws and regulations are structured.

As of July 2014, 12 states and 60 cities and counties have restricted the practice of requiring applicants for jobs or housing to check whether they have criminal records (National Employment Law Project 2014). These "ban the box" laws intend to enable minority applicants to reach a stage in the hiring process when the employer will see the individual and not the stereotype. In Massachusetts, the law allows employers to ask about criminal history any time after the initial application. In other places, employers can ask only after the applicant is selected for an interview. Some permit asking about criminal records only after a conditional offer of employment. Some places explicitly prevent employers from asking about arrests not followed by a conviction. The laws exempt some sensitive industries, such as child care, health care, and financial institutions.

REGULATING USE OF CREDIT HISTORY IN HIRING

Another barrier to hiring young men of color is the common practice of checking credit histories. The Society of Human Resource Management reports that nearly half of surveyed members conduct credit checks as part of the hiring process (Society for Human Resource Management 2012). Though negative credit histories do not necessarily prevent individuals from being hired, African Americans and Latinos may suffer disproportionately from the practice of conducting credit background checks because they tend to have lower credit scores than other groups (Board of Governors of the Federal Reserve System 2007). There is also evidence that African Americans have suffered disproportionately from the most recent economic recession, with higher rates of job loss and home foreclosure, signaling greater financial instability and contributing to negative credit scores (Kochhhar, Fry, and Taylor 2011).

The practice of screening out candidates based on credit histories may make sense for some finance-related jobs. But errors in credit reporting and the lack of evidence establishing a relationship between credit histories and expected job performance warrant strategies for limiting the use of credit checks as part of the hiring process, especially when they do not directly relate to the position. Several states and localities have sought to remedy this issue by passing laws restricting the practice (Traub 2013). Still, the use of credit histories in hiring is largely unregulated and has not been evaluated. Efforts to regulate the use of credit checks in hiring should be pursued and evaluations conducted to assess the effects of these hiring practices, and the laws that limit them, on employment outcomes for boys and young men of color.

Addressing Discrimination against the Long-Term Unemployed

Another consideration for employers in hiring is unemployment itself. Recent research suggests that employers are likely discriminating against the long-term unemployed (Ghayad and Dickens 2012; Ho et al. 2011). Given the particular challenges that young men of color face in the labor market, especially after the Great Recession, they are likely to suffer disproportionately from this type of discrimination.

Some localities have adopted policies to address this issue. In 2013, a new law went into effect in New York City that prohibited employers from excluding the unemployed from consideration in hiring and prohibited exclusionary job postings (National Employment Law Project 2013). However, such policy measures are complicated by the fact that using work histories to make hiring decisions is often a legitimate practice.

Discrimination in hiring has been well-documented, and anti-discrimination laws have been shown to contribute to improvements in the labor market for young men of color (Neumark and Stock 2006; Pager and Shepherd 2008). The evidence around newer efforts to regulate discrimination in hiring, however, is limited. We know of no evaluations of the impacts of “ban the box,” credit check protections, or efforts to protect the unemployed on employment and earnings. These newer strategies might significantly widen access to jobs for young men of color at little or no cost to taxpayers, although the ramifications of such measures, including the costs to employers, would need to be considered as they could negatively affect young low-income men of color in other ways.

Addressing Institutional Barriers Faced by Young Men of Color

The mainstream institutions that develop human capital are largely structured to support individuals who follow a traditional path through education to employment. Workforce intermediaries—including government agencies and community- and faith-based organizations—often operate as “second chance” systems at the margins to serve boys and young men of color. As systems outside the mainstream, intermediaries’ funding is limited and discretionary. They usually have a short window to overcome serious barriers faced by boys and men of color to becoming employed in good jobs or any job. Even when effective, these second chance efforts often provide only a modest lift to the career prospects of young men of color.

What can transform and increase the effectiveness of the broader systems serving boys and young men of color? Because difficulties arise in early adolescence but continue into early adulthood, our approach is chronological. We focus on potential improvements in middle or high school (mostly for adolescents/early teens and then later teens); then, we consider post-high school systems aimed at helping young men of color perform well in college and the job market as they transition to adulthood.

REFORMING INSTITUTIONS AFFECTING HIGH SCHOOL STUDENTS

Today’s public schools are failing a large share of young men of color. Here, we focus on better connections between secondary education and career preparation. By linking secondary education programs more closely with careers and with the development of technical skills, schools and systems may help engage young people in school while improving employment outcomes. Rather than creating two-tiered vocational tracking, recent initiatives have aimed at improving employment *and* postsecondary outcomes by providing students with the skills needed to secure well-paying jobs in today’s labor market.

Several models for improving the secondary school experience and educational and employment outcomes involve integrating career-focused learning as part of the high school experience. Career academies, for example, create small learning communities within high schools organized around a specific career theme. Combining academic and technical curricula, they also often provide internships. Career academies have been shown to improve employment outcomes for students, particularly men, without interfering with educational outcomes (Kemple 2008).

Career and technical education (CTE) high schools also focus on employment and careers, but they are implemented throughout an institution, not just as separate learning communities. While vocationally focused schools have not always yielded positive outcomes for students, recent efforts to revamp these schools in New York City show the promise of high-quality CTE schools, particularly for young men of color (Treschan and Mehrotra 2014). The new schools are better oriented to the labor market, rely on strong employer partnerships, and provide students with the skills and knowledge to secure jobs in an economy where middle-class jobs increasingly require strong technological skills. Hands-on learning is designed not only to provide those skills, but also to better engage students in learning.

Key to the success of an expansion of vocationally focused schools and career academies will be the selection of career foci that hold appeal for young men, the identification of strong corporate and philanthropic partners, and the allocation of adequate resources to pay for curriculum development, student support, high-quality teaching, and internship and apprenticeship opportunities.

EXPANDING YOUTH APPRENTICESHIPS IN AREAS WITH HIGH SHARES OF MEN OF COLOR

Apprenticeships are a useful tool for enhancing youth development and improving employment prospects for men of color. Apprenticeship programs provide paid on-the-job training supervised by a skilled tradesman and linked to a formal classroom-based component. Apprenticeships have been shown to help participants obtain high-wage jobs with career potential (Reed et al. 2011; Workforce Training and Education Coordinating Board 2014). Although historically apprenticeship programs have a weak reputation for serving minorities, today about 30 percent of current apprentices are African American or Hispanic. Though a general expanding of apprenticeship does not guarantee slots for men and boys of color, targeting the initiatives in central cities will enhance their opportunities significantly. Moreover, using apprenticeship to widen routes to rewarding careers is likely to do most for those who have not thrived in a pure classroom-based system, including large numbers of low-income men and boys of color.

Modeled after successful efforts in Georgia and Wisconsin, apprenticeship programs could be significantly expanded, with a focus on expanding opportunities for minorities. Based on the experience in Georgia, creating about 250,000 quality jobs and learning opportunities would involve gross costs to the government of about \$105 million, or about \$450 per student year or about 4 percent of current school outlays per student-year. Another place to expand apprenticeships would be in the more than 7,000 Career Academies that operate in the United States in fields ranging from health and finance to travel and construction. These programs already include classroom-related instruction and sometimes work with employers to develop internships. But, few include in-depth, paid work experience and work-based learning that leads to a recognized credential. Apprenticeships could offer these valuable features, while saving money on instruction, which could be put toward counseling and other supportive services.

A pilot program with a well-structured evaluation could test the efficacy and reach of youth apprenticeship for young men of color. The program could answer such questions as: Would the program reach a wide range of young minority men and allow them to qualify for and become hired as apprentices? Would sufficient employers sign up to offer slots? Would targeting the program geographically be sufficient to focus the initiative on young men of color? Would apprenticeships improve educational outcomes of young men of color?

Creating Transitions to Postsecondary Education and into Early Careers

Healthy transitions to college and careers play critical roles in helping young men of color succeed economically and socially. Institutional changes have the most promise because they can take place at scale. Innovative programs can supplement institutional reforms as well as offer lessons concerning the

most effective directions for change. We begin with institutional initiatives and then highlight several programs aimed specifically at at-risk youth.

Changing institutions to better serve boys and men of color will take monumental shifts in policy, practice, alignment, and culture. The systems that support human capital development and employment opportunities are often structured to support those that the system considers most deserving of help: individuals that followed a traditional path through education to employment. Workforce intermediaries frequently work with highly limited resources to serve boys and men of color, who may need more assistance than training alone. The challenges to creating and supporting employment opportunities for boys and young men of color are so substantial as to limit the ability of intermediaries to achieve significant employment gains for this population.

Upon reaching adulthood, young men of color are too often lagging behind their white counterparts on educational attainment and other important human and social capital necessary to succeed in the workforce. To remedy these disparities, government, community, education, and business institutions need to align their efforts more strategically in order to increase economic opportunities for young men of color. In thinking about how best to do so, we focus on aligning education and training systems to employer needs, reforming Pell grants and financial aid, and creating better work supports.

INTEGRATING POSTSECONDARY AND WORKFORCE SYSTEMS AND LINKING THEM TO THE LABOR MARKET

To raise skills, increase work experience, and gain more access to employers and jobs, it is necessary to reduce the separation between two-year and four-year colleges and ensure strong connections and potential integration with workforce systems. Less-skilled men (and low-income students more broadly) need better *information* about job opportunities, combining local/state job market data with career counseling. Education and training institutions need more *incentives* to respond to that market. To incorporate such incentives, states should implement performance-based subsidies to higher education, where such performance is measured not only by students' academic progress and degree completion but also by their subsequent labor market earnings. More than two-thirds of states are beginning to do so.⁸ Such approaches to increase transparency and accountability are supported by the increasing availability of linked administrative data on postsecondary education and earnings, partly due to federal government encouragement and funding (Zinn and Van Kleunen 2014). To ensure that boys and men of color benefit from these changes, measured performance both in academic completion and earnings should be reported by gender, race, and ethnicity.

Data on postsecondary outcomes can also be instrumental in understanding whether institutions are offering programs that are linked to labor market demand, a key challenge facing educational and training organizations. Sector strategies (or industry-focused workforce development approaches) are one approach to connect education and training to labor market needs. These strategies are based on collaboratively designing employment and training programs and services to directly address an industry's workforce needs (Eyster, Anderson, and Durham 2013). Partnerships are created across many players, such as the public workforce system, employers and industry groups, training providers,

unions, and community organizations. The goal is to develop approaches for meeting an industry's workforce needs and helping workers find jobs and rewarding careers. The program elements may include developing the curriculum and credentials valued by an industry, creating a pipeline of future workers by exposing youth to jobs in an industry, steering job seekers to available jobs in an industry through job-readiness and placement services, or improving the quality of low-income or entry-level jobs within an industry (Conway et al. 2007).

Many sector strategies are already being implemented across the country. A random-assignment study of three sector-based programs showed positive impacts on employment and earnings for program participants (Maguire et al. 2010). As a result of this and other evidence of the effectiveness of sector strategies, the federal government has doubled its investment in these strategies through the president's "job-driven training" to strengthen employer engagement in workforce development efforts at community colleges and sector strategies are a focus in the newly passed Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act. According to a recent report, more than half of states are engaging in these efforts (Woolsey and Groves 2013). Many federal and foundation demonstrations—such as the Trade Adjustment Community College and Career Training grants, Health Profession Opportunity Grants, and Accelerating Opportunity—have explicit goals for engaging employers in high-growth industries and aligning training programs with employer demand, especially linked to creating career pathway approaches.⁹ Evaluations of these initiatives are still under way, and it is too early to determine their effectiveness, particularly for young men and boys of color.

ENCOURAGING STEM EDUCATION PROGRAMS FOR UNDERREPRESENTED MINORITIES

College programs that should be the focus of efforts should include those preparing students for occupations involving science, technology, engineering, and math. Those who study and earn college credentials in these fields tend to do well in the labor market. Traditionally, men have been overrepresented and minorities underrepresented in STEM education and occupations.

Efforts to increase representation of young low-income men of color in these programs and fields have included the Louis Stokes Alliances for Minority Participation (LSAMP), which has been funded by the National Science Foundation since 1991. This program is designed to develop strategies to increase the quality and quantity of minority students who complete baccalaureate degrees in STEM and who continue on to graduate studies in these fields. Distinguishing it from traditional scholarship programs, LSAMP takes a multidisciplinary approach to student development and retention, creating partnerships among colleges, universities, national research laboratories, business and industry, and other federal agencies. Hands-on research experiences and mentoring to build student interest in STEM are LSAMP's other key characteristics. The LSAMP program has seen promising student success: the vast majority of program graduates (close to four-fifths) seek additional education after obtaining a bachelor's degree, and two-thirds of participants later enroll in graduate school, working toward a master's, doctoral, or professional degree. Though the program has mostly focused on the baccalaureate level, an evaluation by the Urban Institute recommended that LSAMP focus on community college programs and students, who are more likely to be people of color (Clewell et al. 2006).

The National Science Foundation has also worked to support STEM education at Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs), which have also helped address the underrepresentation of minorities in the STEM fields. In 2012, nearly 18 percent of black US citizens or residents who received a bachelor's degree in science or engineering graduated from a HBCU. Looking at master's degree and doctorate programs, several HBCUs are among the top ten institutions granting degrees to minorities in the STEM fields (National Science Foundation 2014). Similarly, high Hispanic enrollment institutions graduate almost a third of all Hispanic US citizens or permanent residents who obtain degrees in science or engineering. These colleges and universities, which enroll a large proportion of low-income students, are important institutions for supporting improved outcomes for low-income men of color in entering higher-paying jobs in STEM fields.

Lessons from the LSAMP and the experiences of HBCUs in supporting young low-income men in preparation for STEM careers can be highly valuable to informing strategies for young men of color who are not participating or enrolled in these targeted efforts.

CREATING MORE FLEXIBLE, INCLUSIVE, AND RESPONSIVE COLLEGES

Both community colleges and four-year broad-access institutions play important roles in serving young low-income men of color, although community colleges generally serve more disadvantaged students than four-year institutions (Century Foundation 2013). Open access, low costs, transfer options, and shorter-term education and training options characterize the mission of community colleges, making them attractive to low-income, less academically successful students. Four-year broad-access institutions also serve large numbers of disadvantaged students and serve important functions in preparing young men of color for a labor market that places a premium on baccalaureate degrees.

However, the path to a college credential is hindered by the structures of these institutions as well as shrinking federal and state funding. Semester schedules and the long curriculum review process render colleges unable to respond quickly to industry demand and to the diversity of students they serve. Few community colleges or broad-access four-year institutions provide high levels of support to help students persist in and complete college. For many students, academic and financial counseling, advisement, and access to public benefits and personal supports are highly inadequate. Students with remedial and developmental education needs face special obstacles to completing a two-year college program or to transferring to a four-year institution because they start off so far behind. Students who start at four-year institutions also face academic challenges. Young men of color experience lower rates of entry into postsecondary education and below-average rates of success after entering community college.

Over the past decade, much of the government and foundation activity has focused on changing the community college landscape. Community colleges are often at the nexus of demonstration programs to help disadvantaged populations obtain the education and training they need to succeed in the workforce. Some recently implemented demonstrations incorporate institutional change at community colleges as a key element, often as a component of a career pathway framework. Many of these programs aim to change how career-focused education and training programs are implemented at community colleges, with

- class schedules that allow working students to enroll;
- modularized or “chunked” courses in a program to allow for accelerated learning;
- technology-enabled learning, whether in a physical classroom or online;
- better articulation of noncredit to for-credit programming within the community college and of transfer of credits to four-year institutions;
- more effective outreach and engagement of employers and industry that goes beyond advisory boards;
- block scheduling, cohort-based approaches and the creation of learning communities;
- transformation of counseling and advisement, financial aid, and other student supports to be better connected and accessible to students, including through college and career navigators; and
- changes to how students enter and move beyond remedial and developmental education.

Several of these approaches are part of demonstration programs and local initiatives, such as the Trade Adjustment Assistance Community College and Career Training grants, CUNY Start, GED Bridge to College and Careers programs, Accelerated Study in Associate Programs, Accelerating Opportunity, Shifting Gears, and the Health Profession Opportunity Grants. The evidence is emerging that these approaches hold promise for helping young men of color in the community college setting. A next step might involve taking some innovations in the community college sector to broad-access four-year institutions that often serve populations similar to those enrolled in community colleges.

Making Colleges More Welcoming to Young Men of Color

Another important component of changing colleges is making all students feel at home in the college setting. Peer support and support from mentors can help create this sense of belonging and connectedness. The sense of belonging can be fostered long before enrollment in college in how elementary and secondary school staff talk about future pathways; assumptions about student trajectories based on their race, ethnicity, economic background, or the neighborhood in which they live can impede progress in school. Some academically successful students can end up not applying to more competitive colleges because they do not believe they can get in or succeed, leading to a “mismatch.” Once students matriculate, they can be burdened by the sense that they are different than their peers and find it difficult to get the support they need—whether through faculty, administrators or other mentors—to succeed.

Community scholarship programs—sometimes called Promise programs—are aimed at communicating to students while still in high school that they belong in college.¹⁰ In the Kalamazoo Promise program—one of the earliest of such place-based efforts—all students who attend Kalamazoo, Michigan, public schools are eligible for financial aid; those who attend beginning before high school can

expect a full scholarship to college, and those who start in the system in 9th grade can expect a partial scholarship. Low-income students and students of color are meant to feel from early on that they are meant to go to college. In addition to contributing to various improvements in the community (increased enrollment in the public schools, increased tax dollars to support education), the program may increase credit earning, reduce suspensions and, for African American students, be linked to significant increases in high school grade point average (Bartik and Lachowska 2012; Miller-Adams 2011). Research is forthcoming on the effects of the Kalamazoo Promise program on college graduation rates, but early findings suggest that it may slightly, but statistically insignificantly, improve graduation rates (Eberts 2014).

Several rigorous studies have looked at the importance of “belonging” and the perception of social connectedness in supporting successful academic outcomes in college settings, particularly for minority students and those who are the first in their family to go to college (Stephens, Hamedani, and Dustin 2014; Walton and Cohen 2007).¹¹ Programs that aim to create smaller peer groups of minority or low-income students within colleges may enhance feelings of social connectedness. Low-intensity efforts to help students feel optimistic about their chances of success in school have also shown surprising success in increasing college persistence (Walton and Cohen 2011; Yaeger, Walton, and Cohen 2013).

There are also lessons to be learned from HBCUs, which have been able to create a “sense of belonging” among black students and are believed to help students build self-esteem that can help them succeed in school or the labor market (Fries-Brit and Turner 2002; Phelps et al. 2001; Thomas et al. 2012). Even while being seen as welcoming and supportive institutions for young low-income men of color, HBCUs have been criticized for their low graduation rates. However, HBCUs also enroll a higher proportion of students who are low income and academically underprepared. Analysis by the Frederick D. Patterson Research Institute and UNCF found that when controlling for Pell receipt and SAT scores, graduation rates were better at HBCUs than at non-HBCUs (Richards and Awokoya 2012).

Though HBCUs serve an important role, most young men of color who attend college are not enrolled in these institutions. Thus, approaches must include reforms to community colleges and broad-access four-year institutions, drawing from successful models.

STRENGTHENING THE ROLE OF COMMUNITY AND FAITH-BASED ORGANIZATIONS

Even with the influx of promising approaches and grant funding, broad-access secondary and postsecondary educational institutions still do not have enough resources to serve all students and may not have the capacity to focus on the particular needs of young low-income men of color. Community and faith-based organizations (CFBOs) often try to fill the gap left by these institutions. CFBOs know the communities in which they operate and are seen as a trusted resource for residents and the local network of organizations and agencies. But CFBOs may be unable to completely fill the gap owing to limited resources and resistance from postsecondary institutions and employers.

Several CFBO collaborative efforts offer lessons for creating better education and employment opportunities for young men of color. Started in 2010, the Marginalized Males Workforce and Education Consortium in Little Rock, Arkansas, is a place-based effort bringing together five CFBOs and

six higher education institutions to connect disadvantaged men to postsecondary education opportunities; the consortium has shown success with increasing college retention.¹² Another example of strong collaborations with CFBOs is the Courses to Employment (C2E) program, led by the Aspen Institute. This three-year initiative set out to learn how partnerships between nonprofit organizations and community colleges could help low-income adults achieve postsecondary and employment success more comprehensively, rather than leaving students on their own (Conway, Blair, and Helmer 2012). The partnerships were formed around a sectoral approach, customizing their strategies for serving low-income adults based on the skill and credential needs of a particular industry. C2E partnerships saw promising success with this approach; most participants completed the education and training programs and found employment.

REFORMING FINANCIAL AID

Young men of color often lack information about access to financial aid, but several steps are under way to make accurate information more readily available and to simplify the applications for financial aid. Misinformation about careers and the link between postsecondary education and careers is a serious problem. As the College Board outlined in its 2013 report (Rethinking Pell Grants Study Group 2013), career counseling should be greatly enhanced in a revision to the Pell grant program, the federal government's largest source of financial support for college to young men of color. Better links between the workforce system and colleges could improve career advising for college students. A natural extension of this link would be to expand use of Pell grants by young people entering apprenticeships and other programs that emphasize work-based learning. The changes could be implemented at scale and would affect large numbers of young men of color who choose postsecondary education to improve their career prospects.

Better career advising in colleges or through the federally funded, locally operated American Job Centers might help students avoid enrolling in programs that are not a good match for them. It will also help them avoid misusing scarce Pell grant funding and accumulating high levels of debt for programs that yield little in better labor market outcomes. The problem of high student debt has become particularly acute for students who enroll in for-profit colleges instead of lower-cost public institutions. Though program quality and accountability issues exist across both types of institutions, student debt tends to be much higher relative to post-program earnings for those enrolling in for-profit colleges and proprietary schools (Cellini 2012). Governmental efforts to protect students against the predatory practices of some institutions should continue, while creating mechanisms for greater transparency and accountability for all postsecondary institutions.

Postsecondary Education and Training Programs That Could Improve Employment Opportunities for Young Men of Color

Achieving results at scale is critical for improving the education and employment outcomes of young men of color. A lack of resources is one barrier to scaling effective models. But, bringing new approaches to scale generally requires a political consensus on what should be done and how to overcome entrenchment in the status quo. The first step in achieving consensus is to demonstrate the effectiveness of programs of modest size. We discuss below results from a collection of boutique programs that are generating positive impacts on a small number of young men of color. We identify a selection of effective approaches and describe the evidence for their effectiveness, with further detail provided in the appendix. In addition, we discuss several efforts that appear promising but where evidence is still forthcoming, as well as how long-standing programs that serve large numbers of youth could be improved to better serve young low-income men of color. Bringing the most effective of these programs to scale will require financial and technical assistance to colleges from state and federal governments.

Addressing Low Basic Skills in the Context of College and Careers

With about one-third or more men of color failing to graduate high school on time, public and private dollars are often directed at helping students earn GEDs. However, passing the GED test does little or nothing to improve labor market outcomes (Heckman and Kautz 2014).¹³ Still, earning a certificate of high school equivalency can be important for entering further education and for jobs that require a high school diploma or its equivalent. Recent changes to federal financial aid eligibility rules prohibit individuals from using Pell grants to pay for college if they do not possess a certificate of high school equivalency or a high school diploma.

Even when young people come to college with a high school diploma or its equivalent, they are often unprepared for college-level coursework. Research brings into question the ability of college entrance exams to measure the ability to succeed in college coursework (Belfield and Crosta 2012; Scott-Clayton 2012). Nevertheless, such exams are gatekeepers at many public colleges and universities, funneling students into developmental education classes where they often become stuck, unable to advance to take regular college coursework, or so discouraged that they drop out (Bailey, Jeong, and Cho 2010). Some studies show that individuals who earn postsecondary credentials fare better in the labor market, yet even some short-term credential programs may hold promise. In addition, vocationally focused certificates can sometimes yield better labor market outcomes than even a bachelor's degree, depending on the occupation (Carnevale, Rose, and Cheah 2011; Carnevale, Rose, and Hanson 2012). Thus, programs that link GED preparation or basic skills development and building college-level skills offer promise for young men of color.

Often called bridge programs, these efforts combine basic skills instruction with occupational and career-focused content (US Department of Education 2012). One example of a promising bridge

program that has shown promise is the **GED Bridge to College and Careers** operated by LaGuardia Community College at the City University of New York. Participants received intensive career-contextualized instruction buttressed by counseling support oriented toward college. Though the program largely served females of color, possibly because of its occupational focus, positive results from a small impact study by MDRC suggest that the model may be worth expanding and replicating. Further research would allow researchers to better understand the effectiveness of the program for young men of color and provide an opportunity to experiment with the approach in programs of study that tend to appeal to young men.

Another type of bridge program that has received national attention in recent years is **Integrated Basic Education and Skills Training (I-BEST)** from Washington State. The program is aimed at expanding access to college to individuals who did not complete high school or who had low basic skills. Instead of having to pass the GED or improve their basic skills before beginning occupational coursework within degree programs, students learn basic skills integrated within occupational classes taught by two instructors (one focused on basic skills and the other on occupational content). An evaluation found that the program had an impact on credit accumulation, certificate or degree attainment, and gains on basic skills tests, but it had no effect on college persistence, wages earned, or hours worked after completing the program. Further evidence of the approach will come with the Urban Institute–led impact evaluation of **Accelerating Opportunity**, an initiative that replicates I-BEST in four states.

Another approach to accelerating progress toward occupational coursework and college degrees is to avoid developmental education entirely and instead deliver basic skills content in an intensive and accelerated fashion. **CUNY Start**, a program of the City University of New York, takes this approach. Students assessed as having developmental needs based on the University’s entrance exam are given the option to defer matriculation and enroll in CUNY Start, which is offered at six of the university’s community colleges and two of its comprehensive colleges. Through an approach to instruction that emphasizes “time on task,” students spend 25 hours a week (12 for part-time students) in classes that focus on building academic skills and preparing for success in college. Instructors go through rigorous training before teaching CUNY Start classes, including a full semester of serving as a “partnering instructor,” shadowing instructors who have already been trained. While an external evaluation has yet to be conducted, results of an internal study appear promising: participants showed proficiency gains relative to a match comparison group (Allen and Horenstein 2013). While the analysis did not examine outcomes for men of color in particular, the strong impacts regardless of race or gender suggest that the model may hold promise for this population. It offers another strategy for addressing the problems with college developmental education programs and their role in hampering college persistence and success.

Ensuring College Completion

Remedial and development education contribute to low rates of college graduation, but so do such other factors as financial barriers, lack of support, and weak peer group support. Several strategies seek to address these obstacles to completing college programs.

One model worthy of replication and expansion is **Accelerated Study in Associate Programs (ASAP)** at the City University of New York. ASAP aims to double graduation rates for full-time community college students. Initially designed for incoming students with no developmental needs, the program was created to address other factors believed to interfere with college success, including financial barriers, inadequate support, and social isolation. ASAP employs many of the same components that were tested in the **Opening Doors** demonstration, which tested financial assistance, counseling, and learning communities across a set of colleges (Scrivener and Coghlan 2011). ASAP students receive full financial assistance and intensive counseling and advisement. Organized into cohorts, students take three or more classes together, thereby providing a consistent peer group. An experimental evaluation focused on impacts for students with one or two developmental needs found that students in the treatment group were more likely to stay in school, earn credit, and graduate within three years (Scrivener and Weiss 2013). According to MDRC, the findings from the ASAP study are stronger than any other evaluation of community college programs it has conducted.

While an analysis by subgroup has not yet been released, an internal evaluation report suggests that impacts for male ASAP participants, while still significant, might not be as strong as impacts for female participants (Linderman and Kolenovic 2012). Expansion strategies should focus on determining what elements of the intervention need to be tailored to meet the needs of young men of color.

Intensive college advisement and personal and career counseling are core components of ASAP. Strategies that focus on bolstering student support through individualized counseling appear promising for men of color working to attain college degrees. In recent years, several grant programs have given colleges the opportunity to create new roles within community colleges to support students. Often called “navigators,” these staff members are supposed to ensure that the academic, personal, and career needs of students are met. Low-income students, especially those who are parents and who also work, need help choosing a program, figuring out where to go for financial aid or how to find tutoring assistance, and ultimately making the transition to family-sustaining jobs and careers. By helping students navigate these choices, coordinators can increase rates of program completion and credential attainment for low-income students. While the coordinator role exists in a number of colleges, no rigorous evaluation studies have yet studied the effectiveness of “navigators.” One question is whether intensive counseling works as well for men as it does for women and whether results vary across racial and ethnic groups.

Employment Programs That Could Improve Employment Opportunities for Young Men of Color

In understanding the labor market opportunities for young men of color, the demand side, the supply side, and the matching process are all important. Job opportunities may be unavailable because these young men lack both basic and more advanced skills and credentials or because their skills are poorly aligned with what the regional labor market demands. Young men of color may also be disconnected from the workforce because of criminal backgrounds or child support arrearages. Because the job

opportunities and workplace experience for some young men may have been limited, they often lack a sufficient work history in the eyes of employers. But even young men of color with the necessary skills and appropriate experiences may face employer discrimination. Employment programs for men of color can focus on building critical skills and developing relevant experiences, but they can also help overcome discriminatory hiring practices.

This section begins with mainstream programs that show promise for young men of color and could be expanded. We then discuss programs that have demonstrated effectiveness in increasing employment opportunities for young men but have largely operated as boutique or demonstration programs. The challenge for policymakers is to identify regular funding sources to support these efforts and to create mechanisms for supporting fidelity to evidence-based models during implementation.

Expanding and Improving Long-Standing Employment Programs for Young Men of Color

Youth employment programming is a common approach to help develop the work skills and history of disadvantaged youth and to help support their academic and career goals. Traditional program models include internships, summer jobs, youth-run businesses, service projects and volunteerism, and part-time jobs. Large federal programs include Job Corps and the Summer Youth Employment Program, which build the early work experiences of youth but have demonstrated challenges to their effectiveness.

Job Corps provides men and women ages 16 to 24 with vocationally focused education and training in a residential setting to help them succeed in the workplace and become more productive, responsible citizens.¹⁴ Though a national impact study of Job Corps showed positive impacts for participants in credential attainment, reduced recidivism, and higher earnings, earnings gains were not sustained, and the benefits outweighed the costs only for services to older participants. Components of Job Corps that may need improvement are the job readiness of students and programming for younger participants and those at varying levels of program readiness. Incorporating more work-based learning with employers could enhance the benefits from Job Corps.

Another federal program with opportunities for improvement and the potential to benefit a large number of young low-income men of color is the **Summer Youth Employment Program (SYEP)**. The federal government has funded summer jobs programs for disadvantaged youth since the 1960s. Although these initiatives have been subject to criticism, recent evidence indicates that they can provide a worthwhile work experience, improve academic outcomes, and reduce risky behaviors (Heller 2014; Leos-Urbel et al. 2012; Sum, Trubskyy, and McHugh 2013).¹⁵

Despite some positive findings, SYEP's reputation among policy researchers is not positive. There are concerns that the jobs are not serious and that few skills, even basic employability skills, are learned through the program. Given its large scale and the large number of young men of color accessing jobs through the program, improving SYEP by learning from individual successful programs could help a significant number of disadvantaged young people. Two potentially critical elements for success are

assuring that the jobs involve rigor and real production and having the program document employability skills (e.g., showing up on time, communicating, and solving problems) for subsequent employers. If gains generated by the SYEP and related supplemental activities are shown to hold broadly, the impetus for expansion could widen access to jobs and subsequent benefits.

Supporting Community-Based Efforts to Provide Holistic Services to Disconnected Youth

With an increasing number of youth who are neither enrolled in school nor engaged in work, likely owing to economic and demographic shifts, there has been a heightened focus on supporting these “disconnected youth” or “opportunity youth.” Local collaboratives or multiservice organizations can provide targeted assistance to youth to help support their academic and career goals more holistically. Such efforts should be evaluated to determine further support and expansion.

For example, the **Philadelphia Youth Network (PYN)** is a multiservice, local youth organization that focuses on workforce development. Having a comprehensive roster of programs has allowed PYN to support disadvantaged youth as they progress from secondary to postsecondary education and into the workforce. One PYN program, WorkReady, provides youth ages 14–21 with career exposure and preparation through year-round and summer programs that enhance understanding and mastery of skills (WorkReady Philadelphia 2012). It combines many youth employment strategies—internships, service learning, work experience, and occupational training—with educational, personal, and job-readiness and placement supports. The vast majority of students served are African American, and nearly half are young men. The results are promising but have not been rigorously tested.

Similarly, the Baltimore Youth Opportunity Program (**YO! Baltimore**) uses a caring adult model to provide comprehensive support services to out-of-school youth and young adults ages 16–21 so they can achieve their academic and employment goals. In an evaluation of its program model, YO! Baltimore saw higher earnings for its participants (outearning a comparison group by 35 percent) and greater labor force attachment.¹⁶ Additional promising evidence from other programs with caring adult and mentorship models is building as a part of youth programs that focus on employment outcomes.

Scaling Strategies That Better Connect Youth to Skill-Building and Employment

Making the connection to employers is crucial for improving the outcomes for all job seekers, but especially for disadvantaged groups such as young low-income men of color. Employers may need assurances from a trusted source that someone with a spotty work history or a lack of advanced skills is worth hiring. Intermediaries that are trusted by employers might also help combat discriminatory hiring practices that would otherwise affect low-income men of color. Beyond discrimination, employers may not understand what relevant job skills someone has if they do not recognize the credentials he has earned. One reason might be that the job seeker received (or paid for) training that does not align with local labor market needs. Strategies that identify and address employer or industry workforce needs can help build a skilled and motivated workforce and create job opportunities for young men of color.

Sector strategies are one approach to addressing employer needs that can benefit low-income young men of color. Though sector strategies have been around for many years, they have mostly consisted of small boutique programs serving small numbers of participants, and successful programs have not always served large numbers of young men of color. As federal efforts are under way to expand the use of sector strategies, some cities have experimented with bringing such programs to scale, and lessons can be learned from these pilots. For example, New York City, under Mayor Michael Bloomberg launched **sector-based Career Centers** (American Job Centers or one-stops) in the areas of transportation, manufacturing and health care. A quasi-experimental evaluation showed positive impacts for participants on employment, work stability, and earnings, with those who participated in training receiving the largest benefits from the program. However, earnings effects were greater for women than for men, greater for older participants than younger participants, and greater for whites and Hispanics than for blacks (Gasper and Henderson 2014).

Young people in these programs may need more support than can be delivered by systems serving a high volume of participants. Where efforts to bring strong models to scale are necessary, consideration needs to be given to the intensity of support that may be required. **WorkAdvance**, another test of sector-based approaches, brings together the core elements of sector strategies with robust supportive services to facilitate program retention, job retention, and career advancement. Results of a random-assignment study testing the model at four nonprofit sites are still under way (Tessler et al. 2014). In examining results for sites serving a significant number of men of color, the study may help inform how to best develop sector-focused approaches for this population.

Another employment-focused model worthy of expansion is **Year Up**, a national program that emphasizes the professional development of 18- to 24-year-olds with a high school credential through a one-year, intensive training program that uses a combination of hands-on skill development, college credits, and corporate internships to help low-income youth become self-sufficient. The first half of the program is spent in the classroom learning technical and professional skills; the second half is spent in an internship at one of Year Up's 250 employer sites. Students also earn up to 23 college credits. A small-scale impact study of Year Up found promising early results (Roder and Elliott 2011). A key finding: the focus on strong industry sectors and local labor market needs helped Year Up participants succeed. Year Up is already expanding to 13 cities.

The success of these two program models seems to be related to having the training focus on employer demand for occupational skills and job readiness. In Year Up, the program's success may stem from persuading employers to take a chance on minority youth and the strong participant supports provided throughout the program. For low-income young men of color, connecting or reconnecting to the labor force requires strong engagement practices to prepare and motivate them to pursue a career in a particular field and to make them feel they can be successful. Partnerships with employers are crucial to program success. Careful matching of job candidates and potential employers has to occur for employers to trust the program as a valuable intermediary for hiring. These relationships also may combat discriminatory hiring practices on the part of employers.

Though traditional youth employment models have been around for a long time, the next generation of programs that hold the most promise links career interest, aptitude, and skills at multiple points in a youth's trajectory and provides intensive supports that connect youth to a caring adult or a mentor. Any new employment-focused programming for young men of color must consider how to address the educational and skill needs of youth but also the personal and social supports that help them achieve continued success in pursuing work and a career. Early identification of issues that lead to dropping out or poor performance by youth in these programs may also help programs find ways that support and strengthen youths' connection to skill-building and employment.

Creating Employment Programs Tailored to the Needs of Fathers and Men with Criminal Records

Another approach is to increase services to young men facing special challenges resulting from incarceration or unwed fatherhood and to improve the systems that can support or impede their success. Strategies to minimize these barriers must take a comprehensive approach, including (1) the demand side of the job market—where employers remain very skeptical of the skills and job readiness of people with criminal records; (2) the supply side, where the skills and work experience of individuals tend to be low, as are their incentives to work in the formal economy (especially if they are in arrears on their child support payments and thus face very high tax rates on earnings); (3) job matching between employers and workers; and (4) the systems (criminal justice, child support and education) that interact to create additional challenges for young men. Often, workers need employment experience in a very supportive setting, both to increase their basic work readiness and to demonstrate convincingly to employers that they are job ready. Developing a work record that can generate a credible reference from program sponsors can reduce statistical discrimination because workers can supply employers with enough reliable information for applicants to be judged as individuals, not as members of a group that poses risks of high turnover and poor work habits. Support from programs can help address other barriers like wage garnishment that may discourage young men from participating in on-the-books employment.

Some programs have shown promise in addressing these problems through the use of transitional jobs. For example, **Employment Works**, a program of the Center for Economic Opportunities, provides New York City probationers with transitional jobs and/or intensive job search and readiness assistance to help them find longer-term, unsubsidized employment. Employment Works participants who received more services were more likely to be placed in a job than those in the general population being served by the city's one-stop centers. Those placed in a job decreased their odds of rearrest by 80 percent (Henderson et al. 2013).

Similarly, participants in a program for former prisoners operated by the **Center for Employment Opportunities** (also based in New York City) demonstrated lower recidivism rates. However, impacts on employment faded over time and were mostly attributable to the subsidized jobs participants held as part of the program. Participants who entered the program soon after release from prison did better than those who waited longer to enroll (Redcross et al. 2012). Findings from this random-assignment evaluation and other evaluations of subsidized employment programs for former-prisoners suggest that

further enhancements—such as additional support through mentoring or peer groups, improved skill preparation, or better connections to employers and jobs—may be worth exploring to help this population of young men of color achieve success in the labor market (Redcross et al. 2012; Valentine 2012).

Beyond criminal records, another barrier for many low-income men of color is child support orders, which can get in the way of formal employment because of the fear of wage garnishment. **Fathers at Work** tested models for helping young low-income noncustodial fathers support themselves and their children through employment, child support, and parenting services provided by established workforce development organizations (Spaulding, Grossman, and Wallace 2009). Programs worked closely with child support agencies to address issues of wage garnishment and arrears that can often get in the way of legitimate work. In a quasi-experimental study, participants—who were predominantly young men of color, many with criminal histories—earned twice as much as a matched comparison group at follow-up. However, annual earnings were low. The next section of this paper speaks to strategies for increasing job quality for young men of color who are often relegated to low-wage work.

Addressing Low Wages and Poor Job Quality

Though improving education and training systems can help boys and men of color prepare for good jobs, increasing the number of jobs paying adequate wages is important as well. Full employment is perhaps the best overall strategy for generating healthy wage growth, even for jobs now paying low wages. Raising the minimum wage while minimizing job losses is another. Other broad approaches involve persuading employers to reduce the uncertainty concerning the number and schedule of paid working hours, limiting the degree of unwanted contingent work, and increasing job security.

Other strategies, including sectoral initiatives and apprenticeship, can encourage employers to upgrade jobs and increase skills that provide boys and men of color with the qualifications to fill the upgraded jobs. While many sectoral initiatives focus on improving access to good jobs for certain disadvantaged populations, such as minority males, others emphasize raising the quality of jobs (Conway et al. 2007).

Primavera Works is an example of a sector-based program that both targets young men of color and aims to improve job quality, focusing on changing exploitative practices in the day labor industry in Tucson, Arizona. These practices included charging fees (transportation, equipment, and check cashing) that drove workers' net wages to as little as \$2 a day. As documented in a P/PV study, Primavera Works provided worker support and pretraining, along with offering higher hourly wages, free transportation, lunch, and equipment to the mostly homeless workers it employs. Operating as a standard temporary agency, but with added worker bonuses, Primavera staff used their knowledge of day-labor practices to pitch their workers as better prepared and supported. While their goal had been to improve jobs by creating competition for for-profit firms engaging in behavior that negatively impacted the working conditions of their employees, Primavera Works soon realized that it was competing with multinational corporations that brought the advantage of scale and resources. Continuing to operate its day labor business, the organization turned to a legislative strategy to improve the working conditions of day

laborers. Partnering with local social service organizations, businesses and policymakers, the organization worked to pass legislation in Arizona prohibiting day labor firms from charging fees to workers that brought their earnings below the minimum wage and from charging fees to cash worker paychecks (Roder, Clymber, and Wyckoff 2008).

Other sector programs that have taken this multipronged approach of providing training to workers, educating customers, and pursuing regulatory strategies include **Restaurant Opportunities Centers United**, which works on behalf of workers in the restaurant industry, and the **Paraprofessional Healthcare Institute**, which focuses on the direct health care workforce. All these efforts to improve job quality include similar components: operation of a social-purpose business, worker training and advancement, and engagement of “high-road” employers and advocacy around policy or regulatory efforts to improve the quality of jobs and protect low-wage workers.

It is difficult to gauge the impacts of such strategies, as further evaluation is needed, but they represent an important piece of efforts to improve economic opportunity for boys and young men of color. However, because they are generally small, broader strategies are needed to improve working conditions. Unions have played an important role in securing job quality, but unionization has generally been on the decline in the United States, speaking to the need for new ways to raise wages and working conditions. Such actions could have important ramifications for low-income young men of color.

Research and Knowledge Gaps

The greatest gaps in research involve the general lack of rigorous evidence on the effectiveness and cost-effectiveness of many programmatic and policy approaches discussed above. It should be a very high priority to rigorously analyze the most promising interventions (though randomized controlled trials should be used only on promising programs that have been in the field a number of years and show strong outcomes). In particular, we need more evidence of these approaches’ effectiveness for young men of color. Many of the studies we have cited do not separate findings by race/ethnicity and gender.

Besides program and policy association, we need clearer evidence on which factors—personal, family, and social—drive poor achievement and ultimate disconnection from school and work, and at which points in the life cycle. Another, more positive way of framing this is that we need to identify the factors that facilitate higher achievement, help students stay in high school, and increase employment and earnings of boys and young men of color. Some factors that might work during the adolescent/early teen, later teen, and transition-to-adulthood years include

- early career exploration (e.g., starting in middle school);
- mentoring by successfully employed men of color, and early links to other groups (either church-, neighborhood-, or employer-based) that might raise social capital;
- teaching occupational skills, especially in an applied context, for high-demand and good-paying jobs;

- work-based learning and other kinds of early work experience;
- career pathways that start in high school and/or college; or
- counseling for high school students on the full range of both college and career opportunities.

When the research identifies the points at which disconnection occurs or is prevented, then appropriate individual or social/systemic remedies would become more apparent.

In addition to estimating the impacts on participants of promising interventions on young men of color, efforts should be undertaken to learn how employers can help enhance job quality and improve the access of young men of color to good jobs and career paths. On the demand side of the job market, we need to document and assess institutional changes that occur when implementing interventions for young men of color. Conducting systems analyses using such methods as social network analysis is not typically how academic and policy researchers look for evidence of an intervention's effectiveness. However, little is known about how interventions requiring systems change fare and whether these interventions affect and sustain change. Several current evaluations—of the Health Profession Opportunity Grants, the Trade Adjustment Assistance Community College and Career Training grants, and Accelerating Opportunity—are using a mix of methods to assess institutional changes, especially within state systems, local workforce systems, and community colleges.

Conclusion

Although the economic opportunities of men of color are influenced by many factors that begin at birth and continue through adulthood, strategies that focus on late adolescence and the early 20s and the nexus between education and careers could significantly improve men of color's life outcomes. Improving the productivity and scale of investments in skill-building programs for young men of color is essential. So, too, are institutional changes that can combat persistent discrimination in the labor market and that can encourage adaptation by institutions that have proved ineffective in meeting the needs of employers or a changing student population. Only through a comprehensive approach that includes attention to the skill needs of this population along with reforms to the systems that helped create these racial gaps can policymakers and philanthropy achieve equal economic opportunity for boys and young men of color.

Appendix: Selected Programs and Strategies

Program/ strategy	Population served	Main focus/purpose (activities, goals)	Evidence
GED Bridge to College and Careers (strong evidence)	Individuals without high school credentials with at least 7th grade reading levels as measured by the Test for Adult Basic Education	Offers intensive career-contextualized GED instruction buttressed by counseling support oriented toward college. Served participants who were two-thirds female, 85 percent African American or Latino, and half receiving public assistance.	In a small, random-assignment study, MDRC found that one year after enrolling in the program, participants were far more likely to have completed the course, passed the GED exam, and enrolled in college than students in the college's standard GED preparation course. The small sample prohibited researchers from analyzing program impacts for subgroups, including young men of color (Martin and Braudus 2013).
Integrated Basic Education and Skills Training (evidence)	Individuals who have not completed high school or have low basic skills	Integrates basic skills content within occupational classes taught by two instructors.	An evaluation found that the program had an impact on credit accumulation, certificate or degree attainment, and gains on basic skills test, but it had no effect on college persistence, wages earned, or hours worked after completing the program (Zeidenber, Cho, and Jenkins 2010).
Accelerating Opportunity (promising)	College students	Aims to improve community colleges through contextualized, integrated and accelerated, for-credit pathways that provide valued occupational credentials and enhanced supportive services. Aims to change perceptions of adult education students.	A formal evaluation has not yet been conducted. The Urban Institute is leading an impact evaluation of the program in four states.
CUNY Start (evidence)	Students with developmental needs entering community college	Involves intensive instruction focused on building academic skills and preparing for success in college, combined with advisement support; aims to help students bypass college developmental coursework.	An external evaluation has not yet been conducted. An internal study, using a matched comparison group design and propensity-score matching, found proficiency gains in reading, writing, math, and other skill areas, regardless of race or gender. Nearly a third of participants required no further remediation, compared with 6 percent of the comparison group. Participants also performed modestly better once starting degree programs, earning more credits and obtaining higher grade point averages (Allen and Horenstein 2013).

Program/ strategy	Population served	Main focus/purpose (activities, goals)	Evidence
Accelerated Study in Associate Programs (strong evidence)	Associate degree students with two or fewer developmental needs in specified degree programs	Aims to increase graduation rates through a cohort model, full financial assistance, and intensive counseling and advisement.	An experimental evaluation focused on impacts for students with one or two developmental needs found that students in the treatment group were more likely to stay in school, earn credit, and graduate within three years (Scrivener and Weiss 2013). According to MDRC, the findings from the ASAP study are stronger than any other evaluation of community college programs it has conducted.
Opening Doors (strong evidence)	Community college students	Involves a series of interventions designed to improve academic performance and degree completion, including the creation of learning communities, performance-based increases in financial incentives, and support and service provisions (including mandatory academic counseling).	An MDRC study found impacts for all three intervention types. Financial incentives appear to have increased registration rates: for example, during the second program semester 57 percent of participants registered compared with 39 percent for the control group. The incentives also improved academic performance. Study participants were mostly women (Scrivener and Coghlan 2011).
Job Corps (evidence)	Men and women ages 16–24	Provides vocationally focused education and training in a residential setting to help participants succeed in the workplace and become more productive, responsible citizens.	A national impact study found that Job Corps participants made significant gains in earning high school credentials and vocational certificates; those with criminal histories also had reduced recidivism rates. Significant earnings gains were found in the two years after random assignment, but those gains did not persist after four years. The gains were concentrated among the older participants. Job Corps is a high-cost intervention, but the benefits outweigh the costs for older participants and taxpayers (Schochet, Burghardt, and Glazerman 2001).
Summer Youth Employment Program (evidence)	Disadvantaged youth	Provides summer jobs.	A rigorous study of New York City’s program found about a 3 percent increase in school attendance for students at high educational risk (Leos-Urbel et al. 2012). Evidence indicates that combining summer jobs with cognitive behavioral therapy in the One Summer Plus program caused a 51 percent decrease in violent-crime arrests in the seven months after the program (Heller 2014). An evaluation of a Boston summer jobs program also found evidence that the program reduced risky and violent behaviors (Sum et al. 2012).

Program/ strategy	Population served	Main focus/purpose (activities, goals)	Evidence
Philadelphia Youth Network (promising)	Disadvantaged youth	Uses comprehensive programs and services to support local disadvantaged youth as they progress from secondary to postsecondary education and into the workforce.	A formal evaluation has not yet been conducted.
Baltimore Youth Opportunity Program (promising)	Out-of-school youth and young adults ages 16–21	Uses a caring adult model to provide comprehensive support services to achieve participants' academic and employment goals.	In an internal evaluation of its program model, YO! Baltimore saw higher earnings for its participants (outearning a comparison group by 35 percent) and greater labor force attachment (http://www.yobaltimore.org/yo_impact.html).
Sector-based Career Centers (evidence)	Unemployed and incumbent workers	American job centers that provide industry-specific job services and training.	A quasi-experimental evaluation showed positive impacts for participants on employment, work stability and earnings, with those who participated in training receiving the largest benefits from the program (Gasper and Henderson 2014).
WorkAdvance (untested)	Low-income individuals	Combines sector-focused approaches with retention and advancement strategies for up to two years. Includes preemployment and career readiness services, occupational skills training, job development and placement, and postemployment retention and advancement services.	An experimental evaluation is currently under way (Tessler et al. 2014).
Year Up (strong evidence)	18- to 24-year-olds with high school diplomas or GEDs	Focuses on professional development through a one-year, intensive training program that uses hands-on skill development, college credits, and corporate internships to help low-income youth become self-sufficient.	In the second year after random assignment, in a small-scale impact study, Year Up participants had annual earnings about 30 percent higher than the control group, a difference of \$3,461. The average hourly wage for Year Up participants was higher than the control group, and Year Up participants more often engaged in full-time work. Over half the study participants were male, and more than 84 percent were people of color (Roder and Elliott 2011).

Program/ strategy	Population served	Main focus/purpose (activities, goals)	Evidence
Employment Works (promising)	Probationers	Provides transitional jobs and/or intensive job search and readiness assistance to help probationers find longer-term, unsubsidized employment.	Though a formal evaluation has not yet been conducted, an assessment of the program found that participants who received more services were more likely to be placed in a job (26 percent placement rate in Brooklyn and 33 percent placement rate in Queens) than those in the general population being served by the city's one-stop centers. Those placed in a job decreased their odds of re-arrest 80 percent (Henderson et al. 2013).
Center for Employment Opportunities (evidence)	Former prisoners	Helps former prisoners find and sustain employment through subsidized jobs, support services, and job placement assistance.	A random assignment study found that the program increased employment and earnings initially, but gains were attributable to subsidized jobs. Employment and earnings gains relative to the comparison group were not sustained. The program significantly reduced recidivism, with the most promising impacts occurring among former prisoners who enrolled shortly after release from prison (Redcross et al. 2012).
Fathers at Work (evidence)	Fathers ages 30 and younger	Helps young low-income noncustodial fathers support themselves and their children through employment, child support, and parenting services; operated by experienced workforce organizations.	An evaluation using quasi-experimental design and propensity-score matching found that participants increased their earnings by about \$4,600 and earned twice as much as the comparison group. Participants paid \$52.19 more in child support monthly on average than the comparison group. Visitation with children did not change, and fathers had more arguments with the mothers of their children (Spaulding, Grossman, and Wallace 2009).
Primavera Works (untested)	Day laborers	Operates a social purpose business, provides worker training and advancement services, and advocates to improve job quality and employment outcomes in Tucson, Arizona.	A formal evaluation has not yet been conducted.
Restaurant Opportunities Centers United (untested)	Restaurant workers	Operates a social purpose business, provides worker training and advancement services, and advocates to improve job quality and employment outcomes in the restaurant industry nationwide.	A formal evaluation has not yet been conducted.

Program/ strategy	Population served	Main focus/purpose (activities, goals)	Evidence
Paraprofessional Healthcare Institute (untested)	Direct care workers	Operates a social purpose business, provides worker training and advancement services, and advocates to improve job quality and employment outcomes for the direct care workforce nationwide.	A formal evaluation has not yet been conducted.

Notes: untested = no known evaluations; promising = positive outcomes; evidence = a quasi-experimental study with positive findings or a randomized control trial with mixed findings; strong evidence = randomized control trial with strong positive findings.

Notes

1. Unemployment rates only count people who are unemployed but actively looking for work. Rates would be much higher if they included people who have left the labor market because they have been unable to find jobs or believe jobs are not available.
2. Authors' tabulations from the March 2013 Current Population Survey.
3. For a discussion of financial aid and student debt issues for students of color, see Sophia Kerby, "How Student Debt Impacts Students of Color: An Interest Rate Hike Will Disproportionately Hurt These Students," Center for American Progress, April 26, 2012, <https://www.americanprogress.org/issues/higher-education/news/2012/04/26/11375/how-student-debt-impacts-students-of-color/>.
4. Edin and Nelson (2013) provides strong ethnographic evidence on how these forces play out for noncustodial fathers over time.
5. For a review of the literature and research on discrimination, see Rogers (2006).
6. For a discussion of the issue and these approaches, see Holzer (2006).
7. See "EEOC Enforcement Guidance: Consideration of Arrest and Conviction Records in Employment Decisions under Title VII of the Civil Rights Act of 1964," last updated April 25, 2012, http://www.eeoc.gov/laws/guidance/arrest_conviction.cfm.
8. See "Performance-Based Funding for Higher Education," National Conference of State Legislatures, last updated January 13, 2015, <http://www.ncsl.org/research/education/performance-funding.aspx>.
9. For a review of employer engagement strategies and evidence, see Barnow and Spaulding (forthcoming).
10. For a map of Promise Scholarship programs, see <https://upjohn.maps.arcgis.com/apps/OnePane/basicviewer/index.html?appid=a894537bd8444a4e902431b9269eaa79>.
11. See also Paul Tough, "Who Gets to Graduate?" *New York Times*, May 15, 2014.
12. See *Learnings from Place-Based Boys and Men of Color Initiatives* (Oakland, CA: PolicyLink, forthcoming).
13. Recent changes to the GED—and new competing tests being used in some states—are partly aimed at addressing the test's inadequacies. Because the new test was introduced in 2014, it is too early to say whether it is better aligned with postsecondary education and the labor market.
14. See "Does Job Corps Work? An Update," Mathematica Policy Research, <http://www.mathematica-mpr.com/labor/jobcorps.asp>.

15. See J. Leos-Urbel, “What Is a Summer Job Worth? The Causal Impact of Summer Youth Employment on Academic Outcomes: Evidence from a Large-Scale Lottery,” manuscript under review.
16. See http://www.yobaltimore.org/yo_impact.html for internal reports documenting the impact of YO! Baltimore.

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