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**Beyond Equality: Movement of Opportunities Rising for Everyone (BE:MORE)**

**Fostering Solutions to Black Male Disparities in Social, Economic, and Political Life Outcomes**

**Concept Paper**

BE:MORE and the Vera Institute of Justice (Vera) seek funding to complete Phase One of a three-phased project that aims to disseminate specific solutions to social, economic, and political disparities for black males. The project is informed by Vera’s pilot research[[1]](#footnote-1) and over 100 subsequent conversations with key stakeholders,[[2]](#footnote-2) which demonstrated that a multidisciplinary approach is needed to develop lasting solutions to social, economic, and political disparities for black males. The project will apply existing research to identify innovative solutions to social (education, health, housing), economic (employment, income, wealth), and political (criminal justice, political participation) race-based disparities. In consultation with researchers, community leaders, and policymakers in the three sectors, Phase 1 will synthesize cross-disciplinary scholarship into a singular framework. Phases 2 and 3 will respectively translate Phase 1 findings into animated videos for broad consumption, disseminate the findings to stakeholders nationwide, and actively collaborate with stakeholders to implement strategies identified by the findings.

*Problems*

Despite significant progress over the last 50 years, hypersegregation, concentrated poverty, mass unemployment, and mass incarceration remain lived realities for a disproportionate number of black males. While it is no surprise that communities of color, and particularly black males, are socio-economically and politically disadvantaged, very little knowledge about promising strategies to address specific challenges causing and sustaining these disadvantages exists. In the past two decades, researchers have developed important data-driven solutions to address these challenges. However, much of this information is scattered across different disciplines and buried in academic journals not accessible to the general public or policymakers. Furthermore, even within the research community, there are diverse and often opposing views about what contributes to these disparities; these range from the theories of personal responsibility and attribution of higher rates of crime and poverty to black culture to institutional discrimination and structural racism. This makes it difficult to summarize specific causes and solutions based on research findings and develop policy recommendations. This project will address this problem by reviewing existing scholarship, conducting original research, and summarizing the findings and solutions in a language and a medium accessible to broader audiences.

*Scope of Work:* Phase One will consist of the following activities over an 18-month period:

*Activity 1: Data Collection and Analysis (9 months)*

* Analyses of Existing Research (2 months) Vera will collect and verify for accuracy indicators in social (education, health, housing), economic (employment, income, wealth), and political (criminal justice, political participation) sectors, and assemble them in one format so the figures are easy to browse and understand. Additionally, Vera will complete a comprehensive review of studies and policy documents across disciplines to list and assemble research identified and verified causes of disparities in each of the three sectors. This effort will strengthen the project’s objectives of collecting evidence from across disciplines.
* Expert Interviews (6 months). Vera will survey approximately 200 experts, including researchers, community leaders, and policymakers, to elicit their views on potential solutions to the systemic racial disparities. Vera’s researchers will use semi-structured interviews and select the sample of respondents using a snowball sampling technique. The results will be analyzed to produce statistical findings as well as narrative summaries. Vera will discuss these findings in a report written for leaders in the nonprofit sector, philanthropy, communities of color, and government.
* Root Cause Analysis (1 month). Vera will use the results from Analyses and Expert Interviews to identify the underlying root causes of and root solutions to black male disparities across the three sectors. Root Cause Analysis (RCA) is a commonly used analytical tool in operations and management to troubleshoot and understand the roots of recurring problems. Though Vera completed this analysis in our pilot work, we anticipate identifying additional root causes after receiving input from national experts.[[3]](#footnote-3)

*Activity 2: Report writing (3 months)*. Vera will use findings from Activity 1 to write a comprehensive report detailing all findings. Vera will seek comments and suggestions for improvement on the report from the project’s Research Advisory Board.

*Activity 3: Roundtables and Final Research Report (6 months).* Upon completion of Activity 2, Vera will host three roundtables with experts and leaders in academia, the nonprofit sector, philanthropy, communities of color, and government to present findings and develop policy recommendations. The roundtables will be structured to bring together people with different backgrounds and will address (a) causes of disparities – Roundtable 1, (b) solutions to disparities – Roundtable 2, and (c) the development of strategy for building support for the implementation of proposed strategies – Roundtable 3.

Phases Two and Three of the project will be informed by the activities outlined above and will focus on: (a) translating the rich data and knowledge developed in Phase One into a reader-friendly publication and animated videos for web-based education; (b) disseminating the publication and multimedia to relevant stakeholders; (c) identifying and engaging stakeholders in different sectors to incorporate recommendations; and (d) helping stakeholders develop and implement the technical assistance strategy.

Vera is uniquely positioned to complete Phase 1 of this project. For 52 years, Vera has successfully tackled and transformed some of the most intractable social and racial justice challenges facing our nation, from securing pretrial services for indigent clients to holistic criminal defense to legislating protections against prison rape.[[4]](#footnote-4) As the fiscal sponsor of the Pipeline Crisis/Winning Strategies for Young Black Men Initiative, Vera housed this research endeavor from its inception and we want to see it to its completion to enable justice and fairness for all people, particularly black males, through nonpartisan evidence-backed quality research.

1. See Appendix I for a brief overview. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. See Appendix II for a list of stakeholders consulted. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. See Appendix I for summary of our RCA. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. See “Vera: 50 Years of Innovation 1961-2011” (2011) at <http://bit.ly/X2WxzK> (highlights of Vera’s major accomplishments over 50 years) and “Vera: Spin-Off Tool Kit” (2007) at <http://bit.ly/14zjWwk> (the complete process of Vera’s over 17 spin-offs). [↑](#footnote-ref-4)