

Lessons Learned from Men of Color Programs:

A Roadmap to Guide Program Development and Beyond

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Introduction: The collegiate experiences of men of color—Black, Latino, multiracial, Native American, Southeast Asian, and Pacific Islander men—are influenced by a wide variety of factors that determine if and how they persist to reach college graduation. Subtle and overt acts of racism and microaggressions from peers and faculty often shape experiences in college classrooms and are two examples of the many hurdles that prevent a smooth transition into campus-based resources for men of color. The lack of access to campus-based resources contribute to why many men of color decide to leave higher education (Huerta & Fishman, 2014; Sáenz & Ponjuan, 2008). In 2020, the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) identified two major challenges that men of color face on their journey to and through higher education: (1) barriers to college enrollment, and (2) layered institutional structures that impact degree attainment. With that in mind, postsecondary education institutions have created a wide range of men of color programs to serve as campus-based resources to promote persistence and degree completion. These programs consist of a combination of mentoring, peer-support, scholarships, and workshops designed to support the psychosocial development of men of color and create clear access points to advocates who are invested in students' success in higher education. To our knowledge, there are no clear curricula or standards of practice that address the needs of men of color in higher education (Huerta & Dizon, in press). We designed this roadmap to help college administrators, practitioners, faculty, and other invested stakeholders (a) consider the inter-related infrastructures in which men of color programs currently exist, (b) address programming and policy decisions at different institutional levels, and (c) improve the structural and programming opportunities available for establishing support systems for men of color programs across college campuses. It is well documented that the creation of inclusive and supportive college environments is needed to ensure that **all** students feel a sense of connection and belonging (Huerta & Fishman, 2014; Kitchen et al, forthcoming; Museus et al., 2017). Creating inclusive and supportive college environments requires institutional agents to recognize and engage across academic departments and divisions to encourage collaboration and investment in the specific needs of men of color. This roadmap aims to present areas of engagement for all stakeholders—internal and external—to create environments for men of color to succeed through the specific development, design, and implementation of both men of color programs and systems of support in higher education.

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Methodology: With generous funding and support from the ECMC Foundation, the USC Pullias Center for Higher Education embarked on a state-wide study of five public university men of color programs to explore how programs are designed to meet the needs of men of color as well as current institutional practices, scalability and effectiveness, and how programs promote and support increased persistence, and to facilitate college degree completion. Based on individual and focus groups interviews with over 170 students, faculty, staff, and university leadership across five men of color programs located in one public state university system, we provide structural and programming recommendations for peer institutions to consider in their design, development, refinement, and support of men of color through gender- and ethnic-specific programs at colleges and universities. The five campuses studied, created and implemented men of color programs that ranged from three to ten years, and have collectively impacted the lives of thousands of men at their respective universities and communities.

As practitioners and other stakeholders engage with our men of color program roadmap, it is important to note that the five men of color programs we studied were not uniform in design, execution, administrative reporting structure, or institutional placement. For example, the programs studied (1) were in different stages of development and held unique histories with their campuses, (2) engaged and involved students, faculty, and other stakeholders differently, (3) had varying stability and sources of institutional, external, and financial support, (4) were managed by a combination of either full- and part-time employees, and (5) were located in either student or academic affairs divisions. Taken together, these men of color programs demonstrate moments of differentiated relationships and service provision to men of color across the five campuses.

This roadmap is intended as a starting point for college and university administrators, campus practitioners, faculty, staff, and others to consider promising practices to support students through men of color programs. We use a bird's-eye view of these five programs to provide recommendations for practitioners and campus leaders who may be considering (establishing/supporting/learning more about) men of color programs. This roadmap is designed to help practitioners to ascertain (1) how men of color programs may fit within their campus

programs and services, (2) if budget capacities and resources are available to support men of color, and (3) how institutional data can be used to highlight the unique needs for men of color.

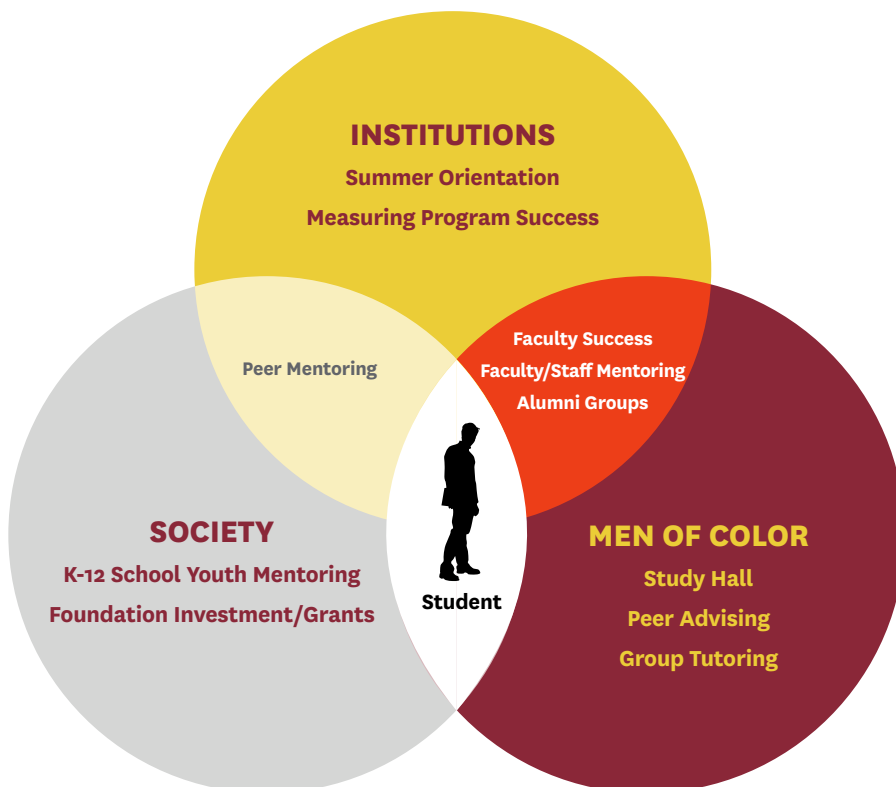
Questions to Guide Developing Networks of Support

- What are the benefits of involving other campus partners for the men of color in my program?
- Who are potential partners—on or off-campus—invested in the needs of men of color? Possible partners to consider: Local or national non-profits, government offices, ethnic or racial chambers of commerce, or local foundations.
- What is a partner's role with and investment in men of color? Will partners mentor current students, be keynote speakers, or provide leads to possible external funding opportunities? OR all of the above?
- How should faculty or administrators be involved with the men of color program that I manage? If compensation is offered, what type would it be? A course buy-out or stipend?
- What compensation is available for campus partners to be involved in supporting men of color?
- How can I engage recent or past college alumni? What would be their role?

We learned from our research that men of color programs engage external partners like foundations, school districts, and alumni through various efforts in their student programming – such as speaker series and mentoring programs – and involve alumni men of color as board members. Each men of color program approached engagement with internal and external stakeholders differently, so the depth of relationship varied by campus infrastructure and resources. In addition, connections to local school districts through either youth mentoring or day-long conferences on the value of higher education were important community engagement strategies for building leadership opportunities for men of color. In some instances, local or state-wide private philanthropies have provided targeted

grants for men of color programs in amounts ranging from \$25,000 to over \$300,000 for academic, professional, or social development opportunities (for example, graduate school preparation or leadership conferences, etc.). More established men of color programs engaged past participants through a type of men of color alumni group that provides professional development resources such as resume writing, dressing for success, interviewing insights, access to new professional networks, or “big brother” relationships through informal gatherings. In this roadmap, we provide recommendations for college and university faculty, staff, and administration who want to develop similar men of color programs.

The chart below provides examples of common features across each of the five men of color programs. The chart is important to understand the broad range of activities, support systems, and resources to collect and analyze men of color success. In the following section we provide further details on the programming and recommendations to implement, complement, and expand to intentionally support men of color programs.



ACADEMIC SERVICES

- Group Tutoring
- Major Exploration
- Peer Advising
- Study Hall

INSTITUTIONAL NETWORKS OF SUPPORT

- Alumni Groups
- Data Analysis Partnerships
(e.g., document and measure student success)
- Faculty Success Coaches
- Guest Speakers
- Peer Mentoring
- Senior Leadership and Campus Culture

LOCAL & COMMUNITY PARTNERSHIPS

- Black and Latinx Fraternities
- Boy Scouts
- Business-Related Professional Groups
- Chamber of Commerce
- K-12 School Districts
- Private Foundations

WORKSHOPS & PROGRAMMING

- Academic Skills and Success
- Career Exploration
- Community Service Opportunities
- Freshmen Seminar
- Leadership Development
- Masculinity and Gender Exploration
- Retreats and Conferences
- Sexual Health, Relationships, and Violence
- Social Justice and
Diversity-Oriented Sessions
- Summer Orientation

FUNDING SOURCES INFLUENCE THE DEVELOPMENT AND IMPLEMENTATION OF PROGRAMMING

For the five men of color programs that we studied, the ecosystem of support varied based on multiple individual and institutional factors. The most glaring observation that we noted was the unequal annual funding across the five campuses, which ranged from \$1,500 to more than \$500,000. The five programs are located within one university system and tasked equally with fostering engagement as well as promoting increased persistence and graduation rates for men of color. However, the range, depth, and level of activities are strongly influenced by financial resources and program staffing. The infrastructure, location within academic or student affairs, and political capital matter for each of these men of color programs. Some programs have the investment of executive-level administrators and others are faculty-led initiatives aimed at solving campus-based programs by using soft and annual grant dollars for programming and staffing. The wide variation matters as it impacts the students as well as the sustainability of each program in the near and long term. For example, the COVID-19 pandemic has caused financial strains for universities, which affects not only men of color programs but also other campus-based initiatives. Below is a representation of the five campus programs' budgets and configurations highlighted during our interviews to provide an overview of the staffing, budgets, number of students supported, and type of programming style to men of color at their institutions.

PROGRAM BUDGETS AND CONFIGURATIONS

Campus	Staffing	Yearly Budget	Funding Sources	# of Students Served	Program Style
1	Director, academic counselor, 2 program coordinators, peer mentors	\$500,000+ per year. Includes personnel, benefits, scholarships	Program built into the university student affairs and scholarships program	40-120	Cohort
2	Part-time coordinator, part-time staff members	\$1,500 per year	Programming is part of the cross-cultural center budget	35-40	Drop-In
3	4 faculty directly involved, 4 graduate mentors (MSWs)	\$60,000+ per year	Programming is built into the university general fund and external one-time funding	40-120	Monthly workshops + drop in
4	4 faculty and graduate student mentors	\$300,000+ per year	Men of color retention program built into the university through general funds and external grants	80-100	Cohort
5	Full-time coordinator, dedicated student advisor	\$5,000 per year	Operates under general funds as a branch of the cultural center and one-time outside funding sources	25-30	Drop-In

CREATING INSTITUTIONAL SUPPORTS FOR MEN OF COLOR SUCCESS

For directors, program coordinators, and others invested in the needs of men of color on your college campus, scan your campus to locate and cultivate relationships with internal and external partners who share concerns for supporting men of color. Institutional decision-making may help bridge connections to stakeholders and improve the delivery of services to men of color. This is especially true when efforts are centralized to create committees or task forces specific to the unique needs of men of color. Based on our observations across the five campuses, we found that men of color issues were sometimes grouped under more extensive conversations about diversity, student persistence, or equity committees. However, the grouping strategy may pose a challenge in clearly identifying the needs of men of color on one campus. Either way, it is vital to account for the various points of interaction for men of color within a postsecondary education institution. Examples of the touch points for a student may include orientation, first-year experience courses or planned activities, summer internships, and academic advising. Each of these planned activities for men of color to engage in or experience is not only a moment for demonstrating care and investment but also promotes persistence to degree completion. Each of these planned activities offers an opportunity for men of color to engage with institutional resources and has the potential to increase persistence to degree completion.



Recommendations for Administrator Action

□ **Administrators should take steps to stay attuned to culture and perspective of men of color.** Across the five men of color programs, over 100 men of color shared that they were unable to be their authentic selves due to the pressure they felt to code-switch—or reject their natural language or behaviors by switching to an academic disposition—when in the classroom or other spaces on the college campus. We encourage practitioners to develop methods to address and understand the institutional culture and how inclusiveness is being fostered on their respective campuses. To do so, we recommend the following questions for self-reflection:

- 1) What are the experiences of men of color at your institutions given its geographic location, resources, culture, and sense of community?
- 2) What ways can the campus culture be modified to empower men of color to embrace their “real persona” instead of feeling pressured to code-switch to their “college persona” while on a college campus?



□ **Better understand campus culture for men of color through assessment.** Men of color initiatives create safe spaces for students to be surrounded by peers of similar ethnic, racial, and gendered backgrounds. However, the creation of safe and supportive spaces alone is insufficient. When administration conducts annual campus climate studies, we suggest collecting and investigating data through an intersectional lens that examines not only race and ethnicity but also centers gendered experiences as well as accounts for the experiences of students from other traditionally minoritized populations (e.g., Pell eligible, first-generation, etc.). We advise that such studies draw on student holistic narratives to actively take steps towards making campus-wide changes.

□ **Administration must support staff in their efforts to promote educational equity.** The men of color program staff reported feeling alone in their efforts to address the multiple needs of men of color. Due to the political climate on some campuses, staff commented that collaborative efforts had to occur **behind closed doors** due to the lack of support and fiscal investment in measures taken to support men of color programs. In other instances, campus leaders expected men of color programs to “fix” the persistence and graduation problems for men of color within two years. However, many of the men of color programs that we studied could not grow without institutional investment to support more comprehensive models, outreach to potential students, data collection, and measured outcomes. We suggest that administrators undertake collective efforts to build from the expertise of men of color program coordinators, directors, and faculty to understand and address the holistic needs of men of color on their campuses. Although some campuses have created initiatives to support men of color (Brooms, 2018), there must be a collective effort from all institution departments and personnel to develop sustainable, campus-wide change that moves beyond the singular resources within small programs.

□ **On-boarding new staff and sharing an ecosystem of support.** How is a shared responsibility, one that centers an ecosystem of support, stressed to hourly and salaried personnel when on-boarding new campus employees from facilities management to senior executives? An ecosystem of support helps campus employees be aware of, trained in, and supported to recognize students’ racial and ethnic backgrounds, genders, and other valued identities, and see these elements as assets to the campus community. This gradual shift in training and professional development can allow staff and faculty members to understand how their actions and engagement may help men of color feel greater support and connection to more college employees. Guide university leaders to see how campus policies and practices may be altered to positively impact college persistence and graduation for men of color. Human-centered changes to campus-based practices matters to the ethos of an institution that intends to be student centered. The external treatment and conditions that men of color experience on a college campus may be tied to stereotypical portrayals and deficit-based messages from campus agents (e.g., staff, faculty, and others). This can then create limits for what men of color can achieve on a college campus (Huerta & Fishman, 2019; Museus et al., 2017). Efforts to promote equity and diversity are important, as is the role of campus accountability metrics in promoting environments where men of color thrive in their academic pursuits, learn, and graduate in addition to becoming student leaders and college and community-engaged alumni.

Bridging Networks of Support: Through our research, we found that men of color programs are intertwined and engaged with stakeholders on and off campus. Relationships with academic offices, student-led groups, counseling and psychological services, local school districts, chambers of commerce, non-profit foundations and community-based organizations were meaningful for drawing potential mentors, guest speakers, or workshops leaders into the men of color programs. The interactions among the stakeholders influence how and what services are provided as well as how universities can leverage resources by coordinating with local and institutional partners invested in the multiple needs of men of color.



PROGRAMMATIC RECOMMENDATIONS FOR MEN OF COLOR RETENTION

The social and academic needs of men of color are influenced by institutional contexts of each college campus. We provide the following recommendations based on interviews with program-level practitioners and student focus groups. We found that each campus developed men of color programming based on the unique history, culture, political activism of students, and general concern about the status of men of color from various invested stakeholders. Our recommendations are designed to provide guidance for improvement specific programmatic services for men of color.



Programmatic Design Considerations

□ **Be mindful of campus-based recruitment practices to engage men of color to promote involvement.** Men of color programs should (re)evaluate outreach and recruitment efforts to create a welcoming environment for all students at their institution. Given the high percentage of men of color who begin in community college, outreach to two-year colleges is essential to highlight a transfer-receptive culture and sources of support for students who are enrolling from local institutions. It is important to be mindful of recruitment materials that showcase a broad range of diversity in age, ethnicity, race, gender, and other factors on the men of color program materials, websites, and social media platforms. We encourage enrollment management offices to be intentional in hiring work-study students, who are men of color, to conduct outreach to local K-12 and community colleges to highlight the impact and value of men of color retention programs.

- How are men of color recruited or referred to the men of color program?
- Some possible methods are word of mouth, text message, email, posters, classroom presentations, or tabling at student fairs.

We suggest that practitioners conduct quarterly outreach to students who are active but not involved in men of color programs to understand why they are not enrolling in men of color programs.

Research can play a critical role in informing the design and curriculum when creating men of color programs. Programs are

well-served by integrating previously vetted strategies that honor the unique racial, ethnic, and gendered identities of student participants. Past research can be useful in determining ways to engage men of color, assess outcomes and evaluate program success.

□ **Accommodate commuter and working students' schedules and needs.** Address the possible challenges to developing a sense of campus belonging that may impact commuter students. Commuter and working students may feel disconnected from campus-based programs, so it is important to find methods to inform students of available services and engage them by hosting online sessions, podcasts, or virtual study sessions. As a result of the COVID-19 pandemic, online programming became a necessity for safety reasons, but programming that considers the needs of commuter students at a predominantly commuter campus is worthwhile, long-term adaptation, so engage community centers, sporting events, and places of worship.

□ **Advertise men of color-specific programs and initiatives through student organizations affiliated with ethnic and racial groups.** Since men of color may be drawn to attend ethnic and racial student groups due to large numbers of enrolled students of color, there must be concerted efforts to recruit men from these student groups into men of color programs. Given that ethnic and racial student organizations and fraternities' have positive impacts on students sense of community and connection to campus (Guardia & Evans, 2008), staff, faculty, and administrators should direct their program advertisement through these student-led organizations. This is another opportunity to build student connections among peers and community partners invested in men of color degree completion.

□ **Create support systems for men of color through formal and informal mentorship pairings.** The value of peer and professional mentorship is important for supporting men of color. Near-peer and professional mentors can help men of color dispel myths about earning a college degree, expanding professional networks, and learning about internship opportunities. We recommend campuses host workshops to encourage relationship building between men students of color and other men of color from various fields of interest. Improved relationships may strengthen their social networks and personal bonds. If funding and resources permit, men of color could participate in mentoring of local K-12 youth or other men of color in community colleges. These relationships also promote higher education pathways for young men of color. It is essential to provide evidence-based training on mentoring practices for the mentors and mentees to understand the parameter of relationships (Sáenz et al., 2015). The network of support is important for building a college-going identity for young men of color in K-12. For example, the type and depth of mentoring relationships will allow young men of color to meet college students who can serve as role models to demonstrate the importance of higher education, share accurate information about college admissions, or strategies for transferring with their peers (Huerta et al., 2018).

□ **Embed the ethos that college degree completion is an expected goal in higher education.** The importance of degree completion for men of color is a critical tenet of programming and support services for men of color when designing and implementing retention programs. Men of color programs are strongly encouraged to illuminate the goals and program objectives on a weekly or monthly basis that centers peer accountability, brotherhood, and degree completion. Encouraging students to be mindful that the goal of higher education is a college degree that promotes social mobility, civic engagement, and career readiness (Hurtado & Ponjuan, 2005).

From field observations and interviews with students and campus stakeholders across five campuses, we observed a combination of practices that matter in the holistic development and support of men of color. These suggested practices are vital design elements for practitioners establishing men of color programs and initiatives to consider for their respective campuses. Each of these elements

contributes to the ideals of an ecosystem of support that men of color need to become successful and how sources of support promote persistence in higher education. Each programmatic element contributes to assuaging the different socioemotional needs for men of color and helps to showcase the community of support that is available across offices, departments, and academic colleges.



CULTIVATING HOLISTIC SUCCESS FOR MEN OF COLOR

In addition to considering the unique needs of men of color when designing programs and related services, we provide suggestions for practitioners who may interact individually with men of color. Being proactive about how to overcome societal expectations of not seeking help, for instance, may be key for recruiting participants and cultivating a high level of engagement. This relates to how practitioners can use explicit asset-oriented approaches when advising students or leading workshops. Practitioners will also need to keep in mind that role modeling socially conscious, healthy behavior is part of student development.



Practitioner Considerations

□ Address social stigma surrounding help-seeking behaviors for men of color.

- Create workshops that help men of color discuss, recognize, and learn tools to overcome cultural stereotypes of not searching for help (Vogel et al., 2014).
- Support students to recognize that key staff, faculty, and administrators can be sensitive and responsive to their social and academic needs.
- Reduce stigmas related to access to campus support services—whether for academics, student support, or mental health services—can play a huge role in persistence for men of color.
 - Embedded within this suggestion, we suggest that faculty, staff, and other stakeholders be aware of the multiple internal and external pressures that men of color face in higher education.

Advocate for students to be interdependent and encourage them to utilize academic, social, and mental support services throughout their educational journey. This requires colleges and universities to be aware of the counseling staff and if they have the cultural tools and awareness to understand and support men of color at their institution. Given campus resources, this can be an opportunity to invite counseling and psychological services to discuss programming and group therapy sessions for men. Consider which counseling and psychological staff members have a history of being both empathetic and culturally sensitive to the unique needs of men of color to promote emotional vulnerability and mental health services.



Men



Women

In 2018-2019, men of color across multiple racial and ethnic groups earned fewer bachelor's degrees compared to their women counterparts.

□ **Identify strengths and utilize asset-based approaches when working with men of color.** We encourage practitioners and other stakeholders to be mindful of possible internal stereotypes and deficit-based perspectives held about men of color in higher education. Deficit-based perspectives may center and fault men of color for all issues around academic performance and adherence to social norms on campus. Through deficit-based perspectives, we project our values on students instead of stepping back to ask introspective questions. We suggest practitioners and other stakeholders work to identify and disrupt deficit-based perspectives by fostering an ecosystem of support to help identify institutional practices and policies that have historically impacted men of color on their respective campuses. We call on practitioners and faculty to challenge colleagues who hold and express negative beliefs about men of color in their local context and encourage them to instead focus on students' assets and change to practices that empower them to engage in professional development and self-reflection to become more student-centered and aware of the unique needs for men of color.

□ **Support healthy gender identity development and inclusive language.** Host sessions on the power of inclusive language and the need to normalize healthy gender identity development for men of color navigating higher education. Staff and faculty can facilitate this process by creating space for conversations about masculinity through programming efforts or by making physical space for men of color in the classroom, the advising office, etc. Topics can include the power of pronouns, sexual preferences, and gender identity as well as how these elements interact and shape lived experiences before, during, and after college. Efforts to help men of color become aware of gender identity, and how gender is a social construct are important in order for men to realize that the ethos of "men don't cry" or "men don't ask for help" can become problematic in their pursuits of higher education. This sentiment is also troubling as it contributes to spaces that are hostile towards LGBTQ+ students.



**Fewer than 20% of men of color
possessed a four-year college degree
in 2012.**

These numbers have not improved in close to 10 years.

NORMALIZE THE USE OF DATA

Collaboration and engagement with institutional research offices is incredibly helpful for building a complete picture about men of color at a particular institution. Many times, we asked campus partners, “What data elements contributed to the foundation of this men of color program?” The common response was the low four- and six-year graduation rates for Black and Latino men. At the same time, data used as the impetus to create men of color initiatives were often not updated to reflect patterns or moments of student departure. The use of institutional data collection provides a consistent measure of important outcomes for men of color including year-to-year persistence, academic probation, major changes, and other decreases in academic units enrolled and completed. Not only can institutional data illustrate and support the anecdotal data informally gathered through programs and discussed between colleagues, but it also creates opportunities for change and redevelopment. Through our conversations with practitioners, we learned that aggregate data on student program engagement is often gathered and analyzed by a few individuals who hold program coordinator or director roles. However, this information may not inform or alter behaviors at other campus offices or academic programs. Institutional data on men of color specifically has the potential to influence which systems or campus-based practices require more attention to better support men of color. When institutional data is requested, data analysis and report findings should be shared with a wide range of campus stakeholders to determine the next steps for improving student persistence and engagement with academic advisors, faculty, and others.

Reflective Questions for Effective Data Use

Institutional Data Points

Q. What does your campus-based data illustrate about programs that are successfully engaging men or color?

Q. What areas for improvement do your data highlight? (e.g., academic credit completion, year to year persistence, etc.)

Q. At what point do you see single or double digit decreases in enrollment for men of color at your institution?

Q. How do students engage with campus services and support systems?

Based on campus data systems, which campus programs or support services do men of color visit? Which don't they visit?

How do programs assess outcomes?

Men of Color Program Data Points

Q. Does your men of color program collect data? What data is collected and how is it used?

Q. Only students who are engaged offer data. What about those students who are NOT engaged?

What would they say? What would the data really say if student perspective was considered? For example, did those students never interact, seek intervention, or have support from on-campus faculty or staff personnel?

Recommended Actions for Data Use

Collect, analyze, and report findings from qualitative and quantitative program data. Collecting and analyzing data can be a valuable form of storytelling that elevates the experiences, challenges, and triumphs of men of color. Analyzing and reporting on findings provides practitioners the opportunity to assess program effectiveness. Collaboration and partnerships with institutional research or institutional effectiveness practitioners is critical for supporting the needs of practitioners who may not be exposed to data analysis techniques.

Assessment of programs or initiatives. To start to address some of the questions above, we encourage program practitioners to partner with local foundations, businesses, and research teams to assess the effectiveness of program strategies focused on supporting men of color. In fact, campus practitioners shared with us that internal programming data such as focus group and survey data can also provide important insight on student experiences, program effectiveness, and opportunities to educate students about other available on-campus resources. Open and honest assessment of “negative” data and outcomes can lead to innovation and creative solutions to problems.

CONCLUSION

In this roadmap, we provide recommendations and opportunities for reflection based on our work with practitioners and participants of five men of color programs. We recognize that men of color face specific and nuanced obstacles on their journey to and through higher education. With these issues in mind, we hope practitioners, campus leaders, and faculty will take responsibility for creating and implementing programs and policies to empower men of color. The timing of men of color programming will often be determined by budget, staffing, and campus investment, so it is important to be mindful of what is achievable and measurable with your institutional context. Men of color programs must also draw from the practical implications highlighted above to attend to programming and policy decisions that may arise at different institutional levels to improve the support systems for men of color programs. The needs of men of color in community colleges and four-year universities require more attention, especially in terms of how faculty, staff, and administration create either receptive or hostile cultures for this student population. It is imperative that institutions work with an equity-minded and holistic perspective to address students' needs from the moment they enroll through the day they graduate.

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