



Urban League of
Philadelphia

2018-2021 Strategic Plan

INVESTING IN OPPORTUNITY



EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

It is with sincere enthusiasm that we present The Urban League of Philadelphia's Strategic Plan, *Investing in Opportunity*, to span 2018 through 2021.

We have harnessed the integrity of The Urban League of Philadelphia's (ULP) achievements for Civil Rights and its position within the Philadelphia nonprofit landscape and joined these with the expectations of the community, key informants, staff and board to produce an organizational road map for the next three years.

As we look forward, ULP staff and board members recognize the pressing need for a strategic shift in program delivery, branding, community involvement, and internal systems. The immediate need to integrate and properly utilize technology across the bandwidth of programming and organizational practices has been repeated time and again.

To achieve this, the importance of taking a hard look from outside the organizational hub was recognized, in order to clearly identify the areas in need of strengthening and investment. There are internal practices which must be improved and numerous community-driven needs that require prompt attention.

Today, Philadelphia is ranked as the poorest of the nation's 10 largest cities with more than 26% of residents living in the state of "deep" and persistent poverty¹. That is a staggering statistic which is indicative of chronic under-education and lack of support for the most vulnerable citizens of our community. Philadelphia's African American population is near 44%², meaning that almost half of all city residents are African American, and of these residents, 26% live in deep poverty³.

Drawing attention to the importance of education, Philadelphia's graduation rate for African Americans and other underserved youth is still near 48%⁴; nearly half of the underserved student population is unaccounted for and shut out from accessing future opportunities.

¹ Pew Charitable Trust, *State of the City*, 2018

² The Urban League of Philadelphia, *State of Black Philadelphia*, 2013

³ Pew Charitable Trust, *State of the City*, 2018

⁴ Pew Charitable Trust, *State of the City*, 2017

It has become glaringly obvious that we must work to mitigate this inequitable playing field and equip our youth for an empowered future. Although ULP Youth programs worked with more than 1,000 students last year, it is simply not enough⁵. We must begin to supply young people with the tools for lifelong self-reliance. We need to do more to train and prepare them for the tremendous growth opportunities available through S.T.E.A.M.-related industries. The implementation of technology is key to begin the ground-level work of eradicating systemic and widespread poverty for African Americans in Philadelphia.

ULP intends to not only educate and empower African Americans through technology, it will also work to give rise to their voices as it evolves into the “go-to” organization in Philadelphia for Civil Rights work. This strategic shift reflects ULP values and vision for the future.

GUIDING GOALS:



⁵ The Urban League of Philadelphia, *2017 Annual Report*

Each of these goals provides a targeted expansion for the organization as a way to best serve the African American community. The goals will drive innovation and lead to family-sustaining opportunities for African Americans.

Raising levels of recognition and visibility in the field of Civil Rights and representing the voices of those deeply underserved will best position ULP to champion for policy change at the most meaningful levels. In today's political and social climates of unrest, it is essential that ULP continue to advocate loudly and clearly for African American economic empowerment.

As previously mentioned, this document serves as a road map for the strategic undertaking by ULP senior staff and board members in the coming three years. Performance indicators and timelines for achievement of the aforementioned goals have been assigned and initiatives are already in action to respond to the needs identified by the community.

The reinvigoration of ULP's commitment to Philadelphia's African American community has commenced; with careful guidance and under the thoughtful leadership of President and CEO, Ms. Andrea Custis, ULP will answer the challenges presented and emerge as the *backbone* organization for African American empowerment throughout Philadelphia.

WHO WE ARE

For more than a century, The Urban League of Philadelphia has served as a strong and capable service provider for African Americans and other underserved populations, meeting constituents' basic needs and offering critical employment, education, housing, entrepreneurship, child care and health services.

Working in collaboration with our parent organization, the National Urban League, ULP has offered proactive responses to pressing social and political issues that impact African Americans and has convened diverse stakeholders and decision-makers, brokering opportunities to drive positive social change.

Yet while the longevity of the organization is laudable, the “stakes” have continued to rise. The deep social, economic, and digital disparities that hinder the collective achievement of African Americans remain largely unchanged. Opportunities for educational and political mobility remain systemically stymied and the promise of a more equitable future is now dependent on digital inclusion and wide-reaching access to technology.

To effectively respond to the changing needs of the community, ULP must continue to operate as an anchor organization and demonstrate flexibility by offering innovative, research-based initiatives that prepare African Americans for the economy of the future.

LOOKING AHEAD

Over the next three years (2018-2021), supported by our accomplished history and trusted brand, ULP will embark on a new strategic direction to elevate our position in the marketplace, investing in responsive technology-driven programs across our platforms.

We will reinvigorate our presence and name recognition in neighborhoods across the city, working with grassroots stakeholders to fine-tune our approach and incorporate community feedback with a renewed immediacy.

Finally, our brand and authentic voice will carry further and more persistently, working to represent the interests of the African American community on local, state and national levels.

THE MISSION

The Urban League of Philadelphia's mission is the achievement of economic self-reliance, parity, power and civil rights for African Americans and other underserved residents of Philadelphia.

Core to ULP's mission is access to opportunities for underserved African Americans. Established in 1917 as The Armstrong Association, ULP soon became a critical service provider and leading advocate for African American Civil Rights.

More than 100 years later, ULP's commitment to comprehensively serving African American residents remains a focal point for the future. While keeping our work aligned with the shifting needs of African Americans, ULP maintains open doors to support *all* members of the community.

As the organization prepares to undertake a strategic pivot, we will embrace a more holistic approach to empowerment and address the needs of the community through the lenses of technology, education, employment, and entrepreneurship — areas that are fundamental to the achievement of economic self-reliance.

With thoughtful feedback from our leadership team and external stakeholders, ULP will work to refine our mission to more simply and directly reflect impact, renew direction, and develop a tagline that tells our story succinctly. To support and recommence focusing on the mission, ULP will craft more cohesive narratives that inform the community of our deep and life-changing work, using client stories and testimonials to increase our reach and brand awareness.

OUR VISION

We envision ourselves as a thoughtful, change-driven, integrated service provider that is harnessing our history and unique position in the marketplace to impact and uplift African Americans. We are the first and leading voice for African Americans and other underserved populations, advocating for real change and reaching our constituents more deeply to drive impact.

It is our Vision that all of our programs will fluidly incorporate and teach technology, utilizing digital tools to overcome obstacles to achievement. In particular, our youth programs are focused on preparing young people for the digital economy of the future — blending technology, education, life skills, and experiential college and workforce opportunities to help them achieve their potential. Over the next three years, our Vision will be realized by implementing the following change factors:

- V** Viability of open and accessible technology-driven opportunities for African Americans of all ages.
- I** Inclusion of African Americans across technology-driven sectors of education and employment.
- S** Successfully advance multifaceted advocacy initiatives to protect and empower African American families.
- I** Integrate ULP staff within all relevant areas of opportunity for economic empowerment in Philadelphia and throughout Pennsylvania.
- O** Operate free, responsive and assistive programs and events for underserved African American families.
- N** Nurture the spirit of African American residents of Philadelphia to uplift their voices, supporting effective and long-term change.