



## Systemic Problems Require Systemic Solutions

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**Systemic Problems:** Solving the civil and social rights issues facing African Americans continues to be complex and difficult. After many decades of public policy and economic efforts, stubborn problems still plague the African American community. In the “State of Black Los Angeles” (SBLA) report published jointly by LAUL and the United Way of Greater Los Angeles, African Americans score the lowest “equity index” (a measure of the conditions for African Americans and other minorities relative to Caucasians in Los Angeles) of any minority population. They have the lowest median income and the highest poverty rates - double those of whites in L.A. and a full four percentage points higher than the next highest population, Latinos. African Americans also have the lowest life expectancy and the highest homicide rates. Even after the significant gains of Affirmative Action and other policies, the SBLA, written in 2005, reads as though it could have described the conditions for African Americans in 1965.

**Systemic Solutions:** The Los Angeles Urban League is leveraging its 86 years of advocacy in Southern California to launch a bold new Strategic Plan that is designed to develop solutions to systemic problems in a systemic manner. In 2006, the LAUL, with the help of the Bridgespan Group and Bain Consulting, developed a unique Plan with three foci: Advocacy, Leadership, and Neighborhood Change.

LAUL has a rich history of African American advocacy, which is continuing under the Plan at the city, county, and state level. The League is developing a focused proactive agenda of issues that are central to the community. And as part of the advocacy strategy, LAUL is working to develop a coalition of partners and is continuing to cultivate strong relationships with political leaders to help drive the agenda forward. LAUL is also leveraging its strength of leadership development and is continuing to create leaders in the community by building and supporting a network of new and emerging leaders. Continued leadership development is required for both the advocacy strategy and in changing neighborhoods, for it is these leaders who will help drive the

advocacy agenda and neighborhood initiatives forward. The major change in LAUL’s strategy is aligning its advocacy, leadership, and other programs to build sustainable, replicable systemic models to change neighborhoods. LAUL has identified a single community, the Park Mesa Heights neighborhood surrounding Crenshaw High School, where the preconditions for revitalization are favorable for a place-based Neighborhood Initiative. LAUL is now aligning its significant efforts, and those of partners, to address a comprehensive set of interrelated needs of that community and to track changes over time.

Our systemic change model focuses on simultaneously improving education, employment, safety, health, and housing, outputs, outcomes, and impact within the neighborhood. This requires strong social systems and the high expectations of every stakeholder involved.

In education, LAUL is working throughout the academic and social life of a student, from pre-K through high school, to foster a rigorous experience in the schools, relationships with caring adults, and a connection with relevant career options, and a positive peer culture. For the younger students, this is primarily taking the form of working with the schools to identify and partially fund (as necessary) curricular reform programs, engaging parents by sharing best practices that help them support their children, connecting students with positive adult role models, and, where lacking, providing or brokering after school programs that give kids a positive social experience and keep them out of gangs.

LAUL’s employment strategy leverages and builds on its current employment programs at its WorkSource Centers, establishes new relationships with employers, and leverages the LAUL Youth Opportunity program in an effort to reduce unemployment and poverty rates in the neighborhood by 50%. To do this, LAUL is supplementing and extending its current programs in four areas: outreach and intake, training, job placement and post placement support.

The safety strategy is executed by engaging the community in the safety solution, addressing gangs, re-integrating ex-offenders, and school safety. To do this, LAUL is hosting a quarterly series of community safety meetings, surfacing community concerns and identifying ways the community can assist with safety efforts. The Los Angeles Police Department is supporting the effort by dedicating a team of officers to the area (through Safer Cities II – a massive crime intervention and prevention initiative). Officers are reaching out to the community and engaging in proactive enforcement tactics that help to get the worst offenders off of the streets. The City Attorney’s office is supporting safety by working to assign a Deputy City Attorney as a School-based Prosecutor at Crenshaw High School to help increase parent involvement and help prepare the climate of CHS for school reform, while the Department of Public Works will engage to beautify the streets and alleys in the neighborhood.

In health, LAUL is working with partners to reduce the number of families in crisis and to support long-term healthy outcomes for residents. This includes piloting a multi-systemic therapy program with the County for those families most in jeopardy (indicated by domestic violence, drug use, chronic unemployment, etc.). For other residents, the emphasis is on better lifestyle choices, such as healthy eating habits and exercise, which will help decrease the incidents of many chronic diseases and obesity.

Finally, for housing, LAUL is working with Operation Hope and others to ensure that current homeowners are able to stay in their homes and that more residents will be able to afford both homeownership and rental costs. Programs to support this include credit counseling, home buying education courses and improved access to capital. Particular attention is being given to the impact of the ability of residents to own homes as revitalization improves property values.

The viability of this solution is that it allows the improved management of the economies of scale, scope, and structure needed to successfully implement neighborhood change. The scale of change is the geography of a 70-block neighborhood of 10,000 residents, which is a reasonable unit of change scaled between the macro level of cities and the micro levels of individuals and families. The scope of change is the concurrent management of five standard-of-living domains and the identification of 1) the appropriate number and type of metrics facilitating sustainable neighborhood change; and, 2) stakeholder-accountable risk-sharing partners with core competencies well-matched with the metrics. The structure of change is the social and knowledge network that is fully-connected system across all the domains, stakeholders, and partners, driven by the high expectations intrinsic to the metrics embedded in the model.