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Leading on Opportunity Announces 19 Community Leaders to Help Address Economic Mobility in Charlotte and Mecklenburg County

Organization will amplify the issues around economic mobility and aggregate efforts to join hands and build a better future for the city and county

CHARLOTTE, N.C., Sept. 19, 2017 – Following the [Charlotte-Mecklenburg Opportunity Task Force Report \(INFORME DEL GRUPO DE TRABAJO DE OPORTUNIDADES DE CHARLOTTE-MECKLENBURG\)](#) released a few months ago, Leading on Opportunity was formed with a mission to convene and connect sectors across the community to implement the recommendations of the Task Force to improve economic mobility in Charlotte and Mecklenburg County. As charged in the report, the organization will take a systemic approach to addressing the key determinants of early childhood education, college and career readiness, and family stability, while simultaneously focusing on the cross-cutting factors of segregation and social capital. The organization is comprised of an unprecedented collection of community, business and public sector representatives who will focus on transforming the recommendations from the report to actionable steps, while developing a data dashboard to monitor and track progress.

When the report was released, it recognized the need to first create an infrastructure to ensure that the community's attention remains focused on the urgent need to address disparities in pursuing economic opportunity. To guide that effort, James E. Ford, Program Director for the Public School Forum of North Carolina, and Andrea B. Smith, Chief Administrative Officer at Bank of America, were tapped as Co-Chairs for the Leading on Opportunity Council. Over the past five months, Smith and Ford, with the support of Task Force members, have worked to implement Phase I by establishing an interim operating structure and, most importantly, bringing together a representative group of Charlotte-Mecklenburg leaders spanning a range of disciplines and backgrounds – grassroots, government, neighborhood, philanthropy, business, faith and nonprofit – to have a voice on the Council.

“Our community faces the hard truth that our children do not have equality of opportunity due to the systems and structures that continue to foster segregation while preventing access to social capital,” said Ford. “We have been very intentional throughout this process because we know that in order to truly make changes here in Charlotte and Mecklenburg County we have to do things boldly and differently while bringing people with unique voices around the table. It was important that the Council be a non-partisan group that brings many different voices to the same table to find ways to amplify and aggregate work aligned to the Task Force recommendations.”

In addition to building out a representative group to serve on the Council, members have led several informal community engagement sessions to present and increase awareness of the findings of the Task Force, listen to voices within the community, and encourage conversations that move people to action. The discussions have provided additional insights that will help the

Council formulate its priorities in how best to carry out the recommendations outlined by the Task Force.

“The Task Force created an environment that pushes us to find unique and innovative ways to address the serious issues that divide our community by race and income,” said Smith. “We have been overwhelmed by the incredible response to the report. Many in our community have already started taking action. But, these are complicated issues requiring us to think about sustainable approaches that combat and overcome the long-standing systems that have created a tale of two cities for our children. Establishing the structure was our first step following the report and sets us up for long-term impact and accountability.”

Phase I Implementation Actions Completed

Operating Structure and Executive Director

Ford, Smith and members of the Council have embarked on a national search for an executive director to lead the daily operations of the organization and advance its mission. The position will also be responsible for maintaining transparency with the community and serving as a bridge for available resources, programs and events being held within the community.

Staffing

Interim staff has been put in place to lead day-to-day oversight, project management, communications and community engagement during the startup phase until the executive director and full-time staff are in place. In addition, a search is in progress for an interim lead to assist in coordinating efforts related to affordable housing and the organization is in the process of securing the multi-year funding needed to support staff, research, measurement and communications.

Council Member Selection

The 19-member council was selected to represent and be a voice for the community and includes the following:

James E. Ford, Public School Forum of North Carolina (Co-Chair)
Andrea Smith, Bank of America (Co-Chair)
Dr. Ophelia Garmon-Brown, Novant Health and Task Force Co-Chair
Dee O’Dell, US Bank and Task Force Co-Chair
Jesse Cureton, Novant Health and One Charlotte
Kandi Deitemeyer, Central Piedmont Community College
Amalia Deloney, Community At Large
Dena Diorio, Mecklenburg County
Patrice Funderburg, Community At Large
Marcus Jones, City of Charlotte
Michael Marsicano, Foundation for the Carolinas
Ray McKinnon, Community At Large
Mujtaba Mohammed, Community At Large
Edwin Peacock, Community At Large
Crystal Richardson, Community At Large
Federico Rios, Community At Large

Mike Rizer, Wells Fargo
Jennifer Weber, Lowe's Home Improvement
Clayton Wilcox, Charlotte Mecklenburg Schools

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