



OBAMA FOUNDATION
ANNUAL REPORT 2019

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A CRISIS HAS A WAY OF SHARPENING OUR FOCUS.

Part of this is human. When we suffer a loss, or become ill, we take stock of what's important. We appreciate the parts of our lives that maybe we took for granted. We revisit our values and our relationships, and we think about how we might honor them if we had another chance; if we had more time. Crises force us to reflect.

But crises also reveal. A housing crisis reveals the shaky foundations of an economy that works only for those at the top. A mass shooting shows the ease with which weapons of war can be obtained by those who wish to inflict intolerable pain. A deadly pandemic hits our most neglected communities hardest, magnifying disparities in health, wealth, and access to care. A man is killed, face down on the street under the knee of a police officer in Minnesota, and centuries of racial injustice and pain are thrown into high relief.

The crisis brought on by the COVID-19 pandemic, met soon thereafter by the killings of George Floyd and Breonna Taylor and Ahmaud Arbery, has led to changes in our day-to-day lives that are as profound as anything that most of us have seen in our lifetimes.

These events have forced all of us to reflect on what matters most. They have revealed what was already frayed in our social fabric. And they have sharpened our focus on what must be done to counter a pandemic, end police violence, and address the systemic discrimination and racial disparities that have been laid bare. They have spurred all of us to take action, in ways large and small, to move beyond the world as it is and create the world as it should be.

That's something else a crisis does: unveils new leaders.

Doctors and nurses risking their lives to save ours. Protesters taking to the streets to demand that we live up to our highest ideals. Workers, who have always been essential, maintaining critical parts of our infrastructure and economy—keeping shelves stocked, lights on, and vital operations open. Community leaders cleaning up streets, looking after neighbors, and matching mutual aid to mutual need. Volunteers making masks and donating blood. Researchers racing to find treatments. Artists sustaining us with new creations. Musicians writing anthems to guide movements. People everywhere around the world calling and marching for change.

This is a time for real leadership in all walks of life. And I'm heartened that the things the world will need most as we emerge from these crises—empowered and enlightened new leaders, stronger and more closely-knit communities—are exactly what our Foundation is working to deliver. These pages are full of voices that I know will play a part in leading us through these dark days and into the brighter future ahead.

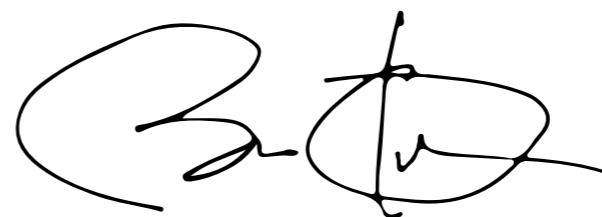
Since leaving the White House, Michelle and I have always believed our best investment is in these leaders. If we can spotlight them, support them, and connect them to each other, we can create a generation of compassionate, ethical, empathetic leaders in nations throughout the world. If we can use the Obama Presidential Center as a place where visitors can find inspiration to lead in their own communities—all while investing in the potential of a vital but long-neglected area—we can lead a transformation that begins on the South Side of Chicago and extends globally.

So much of our work last year involved bringing people together for trainings and participatory education, and you'll see that reflected in these pages.

This year will look different—we are breaking new ground on cultivating community virtually, encouraging social connection in a time of social distancing, and ensuring we use our resources to lift up and highlight vital acts of leadership in this new environment we're all navigating together.

In response to these crises, we will sharpen our focus. We will examine how to best address the weaknesses that have been revealed. We will continue to fight for a more just world.

We will unveil new leaders.



BARACK OBAMA



Dear Friends,

If ever there was a time in which strengthening our communities, supporting fresh leadership, building trust, and taking care of each other were paramount, now is that time.

So much of what we do—from our work to build the Obama Presidential Center to our support of emerging leaders—is to foster exactly these values and promote a sense of unity and common purpose. And despite the challenges we face in our socially distanced world—and the brutal acts of police violence we witnessed as we were finalizing this report—we’re uncovering new ways to fulfill our mission.

Here in Chicago, our plans to build the Obama Presidential Center on the South Side continue to progress. Even in this environment, the City of Chicago and federal agencies are busy completing their work on the federal review process needed for us to break ground. We remain optimistic about our progress and look forward to the new gardens, paths, and play areas—as well as new jobs and investment—the Center will bring to our neighbors. There’s no better way to honor President and Mrs. Obama’s legacy than to support the community that has always supported them.

To support our leaders at home and abroad, we’ve hosted virtual trainings, webinars, and calls to offer relevant expertise to our audiences and connect people to share best practices.

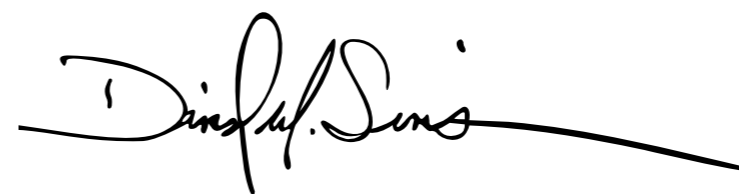
President Obama has been a reassuring presence during several of these online gatherings. He’s connected with supporters in Chicago to thank them for their resilience during this time, as well as with Obama Foundation program participants to encourage them as they contend with the effects of COVID-19 in their own communities. He also joined conversations organized by the My Brother’s Keeper Alliance, along with national and local leaders, to discuss the tragic killings of George Floyd, Breonna Taylor, and Ahmaud Arbery; the history of police violence in America; and specific actions we can take to encourage reform of our public safety system.

Because we know that the COVID-19 crisis is hitting communities of color hardest, the My Brother’s Keeper Alliance has also been sharing resources and hosting a series of town halls focused specifically on organizations that serve boys and young men of color. The Girls Opportunity Alliance, which funds and supports organizations working to educate young girls in the developing world, is helping grassroots leaders sustain their operations and explore how learning can continue when classrooms are shut.

But even as we respond to the challenges of today, the work of the Foundation has always been a long-term endeavor. And to understand how best to approach an imperiled future, we feel it’s vital to understand the progress we’ve made until now.

Those stories of progress are what you will read in this report. Investment that can help unlock potential. Trainings that help leaders grow their skills and extend their impact. Exposure that helps them expand their influence. Funding for evidence-based solutions that help leaders strengthen communities and reform broken policies. Encounters with President and Mrs. Obama that provide inspiration. Chance meetings that propel movements.

And I’m heartened by the potential these stories of progress and leadership hold for the stronger, more connected, more just world we are helping to build.



DAVID SIMAS
CEO



OUR MISSION
IS TO INSPIRE, EMPOWER,
AND CONNECT
PEOPLE TO CHANGE
THEIR WORLD.

THE OBAMA PRESIDENTIAL CENTER



THE OBAMA PRESIDENTIAL CENTER THE SOUTH SIDE IS WHERE IT ALL STARTED.

It's where Mrs. Obama was born and raised, and where she learned to lead in the private, public, and nonprofit sectors. It's the place where President Obama learned to organize and build coalitions that could advocate for change. It's the place where they found their purpose—and founded a movement.

This community made President and Mrs. Obama into the leaders they are today. With the Obama Presidential Center, they hope to return the favor for a new generation.

Here on Chicago's South Side, the Obama Presidential Center will feature a world-class museum that chronicles their leadership while calling hundreds of thousands of visitors to service. It will be a place to reflect and grow, connect and create; to tap into your own sense of purpose and discover the change you want to make in the world. It will be a place to honor history while inspiring young people to write chapters of their own.

It will also provide our neighbors with a gathering space for celebrations, enriching its site in Jackson Park with new gardens for them to enjoy, an imaginative new playground for their children to explore, and scenic paths for early morning jogs or afternoon strolls.

And it will do all this while creating jobs, driving economic opportunity, and unlocking the potential that has always existed on the South Side. By tapping into the boundless talent of neighborhoods throughout Chicago, it will become a campus for the community, built in partnership with the community.

The Obama Presidential Center will connect the economy of the South Side of Chicago with the rest of the city, creating new jobs and opportunities. It will breathe new life into a park that has long been loved, but underused. And it will uphold our commitment to this vibrant community.

In 2008, our neighbors on the South Side of Chicago provided the base of support for a campaign that inspired the world and launched President and Mrs. Obama to the White House. The Obama Presidential Center is an opportunity to make history once again.

Together, we can bring hope home.



**THE OBAMA PRESIDENTIAL CENTER
CHICAGO'S SOUTH SIDE HAS
ALWAYS BEEN FULL OF
POTENTIAL. IT'S TIME IT WAS
MET WITH OPPORTUNITY.**

When we first started thinking about what the Obama Presidential Center could achieve, one thing was clear: It should invest back into the community that gave President and Mrs. Obama so much. With the help of our community, we can write a new chapter for the South Side of Chicago—one that focuses on the region's strengths rather than its deficits.

Through our commitment to working with local and diverse vendors and the economic activity the Center will bring to the South Side of Chicago, we can help drive an economic revival that's bigger than one project or one neighborhood, tying together every part of the regional economy.

Our investment in the community has already begun. To date, we've spent nearly \$18 million with diverse vendors on the creation of the Obama Presidential Center, with \$16 million invested in Chicago-based businesses. When the Obama Presidential Center doors open, it's projected to generate over \$3 billion of new economic activity across the city over ten years.





THE OBAMA PRESIDENTIAL CENTER EVERY COMMUNITY DESERVES A GATHERING PLACE.

“The vision for this isn’t just about the Obama Presidential Center,” Mrs. Obama said at the 2019 Obama Foundation Summit. “It’s about the South Side of Chicago. It’s about our neighborhood and community.”

Places have a lasting effect on our lives. And every community deserves a space that lifts up young people, that is vibrant and alive, and inspires everyone who visits. While children can play in Maggie Daley park, tourists can stroll down Navy Pier, and young professionals can jog on the 606, the South Side hasn’t benefited from the same type of investment in public architecture. The Obama Presidential Center is an opportunity to change that. It’s a chance to work hand-in-hand with our neighbors to create a world-class gathering place for the South Side.

Free, public areas will make the Obama Presidential Center a welcome space to catch up with an old friend or wind down with a good book. A new branch of the Chicago Public Library will offer young people a place to learn about history, while leadership trainings hosted in the Forum building will help them make it. And a playground and outdoor space unlike any in Chicago will offer children a chance to get active and let their imaginations soar.

We’re building the Obama Presidential Center for our community, with our community, creating a place with global reach and local roots. Since we first announced the Center, we’ve sought out feedback from our neighbors to help shape the Center’s design, location, and architecture. And we’ve partnered with the Lakeside Alliance, a joint venture of five construction firms, four of which are local and minority-owned, to help construct it.





- A** **The Museum** will be a new landmark for the South Side, welcoming visitors to Jackson Park and marking the Center as a historic civic destination.
- B** **The Sky Room** sits at the top of the Museum, offering visitors a contemplative space with beautiful views of Lake Michigan and parts of the city.
- C** **Exhibit Galleries** will explore the fullness of the American story and examine the eight years of progress that made up the Obama presidency.
- D** **The Forum** will serve as a place to welcome the local community, housing an auditorium, a media suite featuring a broadcast and recording studio, flexible learning and meeting spaces, and a restaurant.

- E** **The Plaza** will be a public gathering place for live performances and free community events.
- F** A new branch of the **Chicago Public Library** will feature innovative reading room spaces and amenities for children, informational and vocational resources for adults, and a reading room for all to enjoy.
- G** **The Fruit and Vegetable Garden**, with over 3,000 square feet of plant beds, is where young people and community members will get their hands dirty and learn about growing fruits and vegetables.
- H** **The Park** will offer play areas and walking paths, all connected to the Great Lawn by a long pedestrian promenade.

- I** **The Children's Playground** will feature innovative play equipment made from repurposed natural materials—plus plenty of seating and shade.
- J** **The Great Lawn** is a place for sledding in the winter, picnics in the summer, and community gatherings year round.
- K** **The Wetland Walk** is a rustic path and seating area, perfect for an early morning jog or an afternoon stroll.
- L** Jackson Park's historic **Women's Garden** will be restored with plantings, pathways, and seating. It will also become more accessible by converting the roads surrounding it back to parkland.

YOUR OBAMA KEEPSAKES

Many hands shape a movement. This simple truth is at the heart of the Obama Presidential Center Museum. Visitors will see this idea represented in the design of the Museum building, inspired by the idea of four hands coming together. And they'll learn about it in the exhibits, with stories and artifacts from the many people who powered President Obama's historic campaign.

As we work to preserve that history for future display, we kicked off community collections events in Chicago, Iowa, and Hawai'i, as well as online. Through our unique opportunity to crowdsource materials for the Museum, we received hundreds of submissions from people all over the world excited to share their Obama keepsakes.

From homemade t-shirts and handcrafted banners to one-of-a-kind artwork and inauguration swag—and even a set of Obama family nesting dolls—we listened as ordinary people shared the extraordinary impact the Obama presidency had on them. And we realized, even though the doors to the Obama Presidential Center Museum aren't yet open, it's already bringing people together to honor the stories of a history-making movement.

“These pieces that may have been insignificant as individual pieces, when they come together, there's strength.”

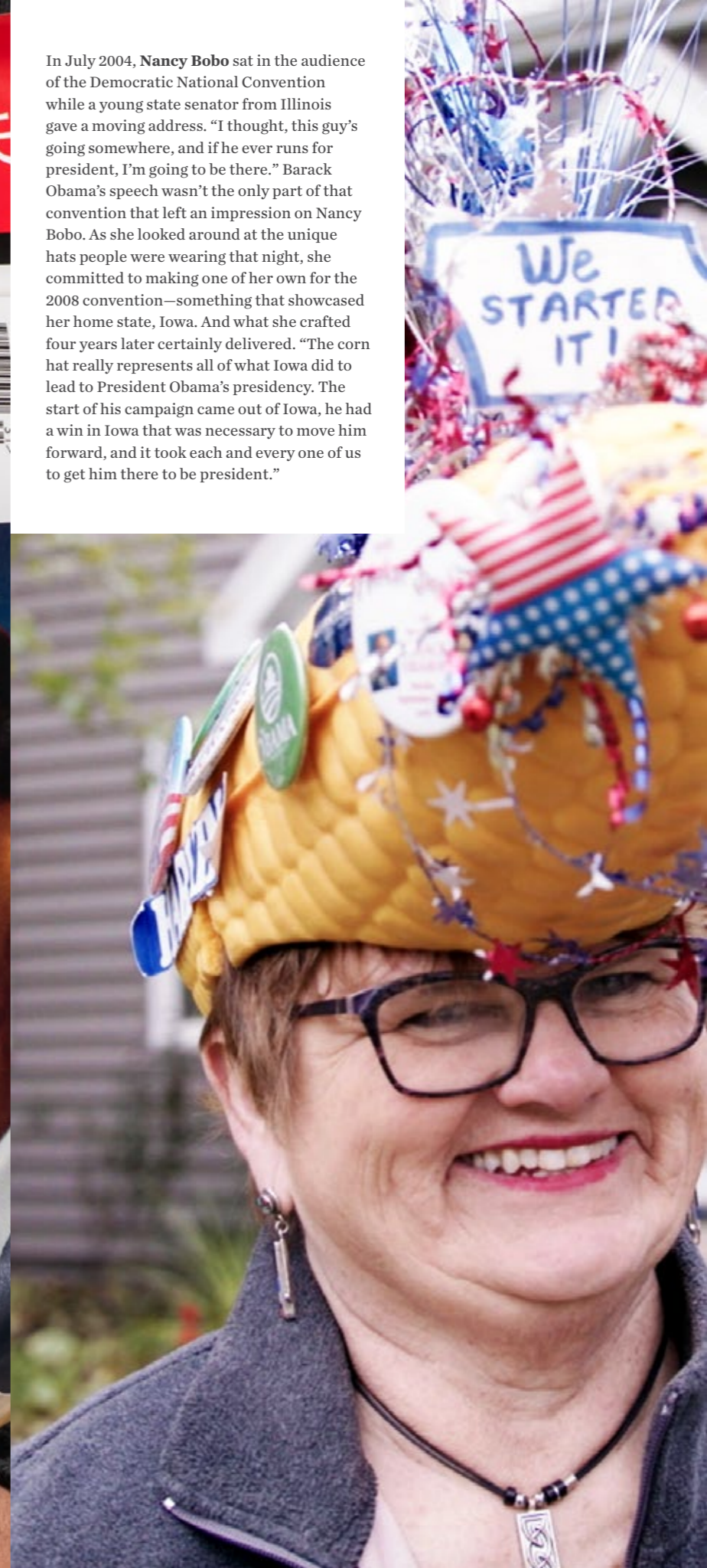
KRYSTAL GROVER-WEBB

Krystal Grover-Webb, an artist from the Chatham neighborhood on the South Side of Chicago, spent over 160 hours creating a collaged scene of two young students reading under a portrait of President Obama. Made out of hundreds of pieces of paper, Grover meticulously rifled through magazines searching for specific shades of every color represented in the portrait. "You don't just take a magazine and rip it up—I have to find a certain yellow, I have to find a specific blue." The piece, named "President Obama Inspires Us to Learn," represents how the President left a better foundation for generations to come—and the collaged format is symbolic of the endless possibilities that open up when individuals unite for a common goal. "I feel this is my contribution to history, to building a better community and making the world better than I found it."



In 2009, President Obama visited China while Iowan **Jordan Oster** was in his first year of teaching English there. Jordan saw news posters highlighting the visit and knew he needed to add one to his collection. "It's probably something that never made it to the United States, and I knew it would be a unique item when I saw it." The poster made Jordan feel hopeful as he embarked on a new adventure in a new country, and it also reminded him of a chapter in his life that had just ended. A year earlier, Jordan had been heavily involved in the 2008 Iowa Democratic caucuses, campaigning for President Obama. Jordan's Obama keepsake isn't only a reminder of one of his greatest adventures, but of his part in the journey to elect President Obama.

In July 2004, **Nancy Bobo** sat in the audience of the Democratic National Convention while a young state senator from Illinois gave a moving address. "I thought, this guy's going somewhere, and if he ever runs for president, I'm going to be there." Barack Obama's speech wasn't the only part of that convention that left an impression on Nancy Bobo. As she looked around at the unique hats people were wearing that night, she committed to making one of her own for the 2008 convention—something that showcased her home state, Iowa. And what she crafted four years later certainly delivered. "The corn hat really represents all of what Iowa did to lead to President Obama's presidency. The start of his campaign came out of Iowa, he had a win in Iowa that was necessary to move him forward, and it took each and every one of us to get him there to be president."



MAKE HISTORY AGAIN

IN 2008, THIS COMMUNITY HELPED MAKE HISTORY.

LET'S PARTNER TOGETHER TO DO IT AGAIN.

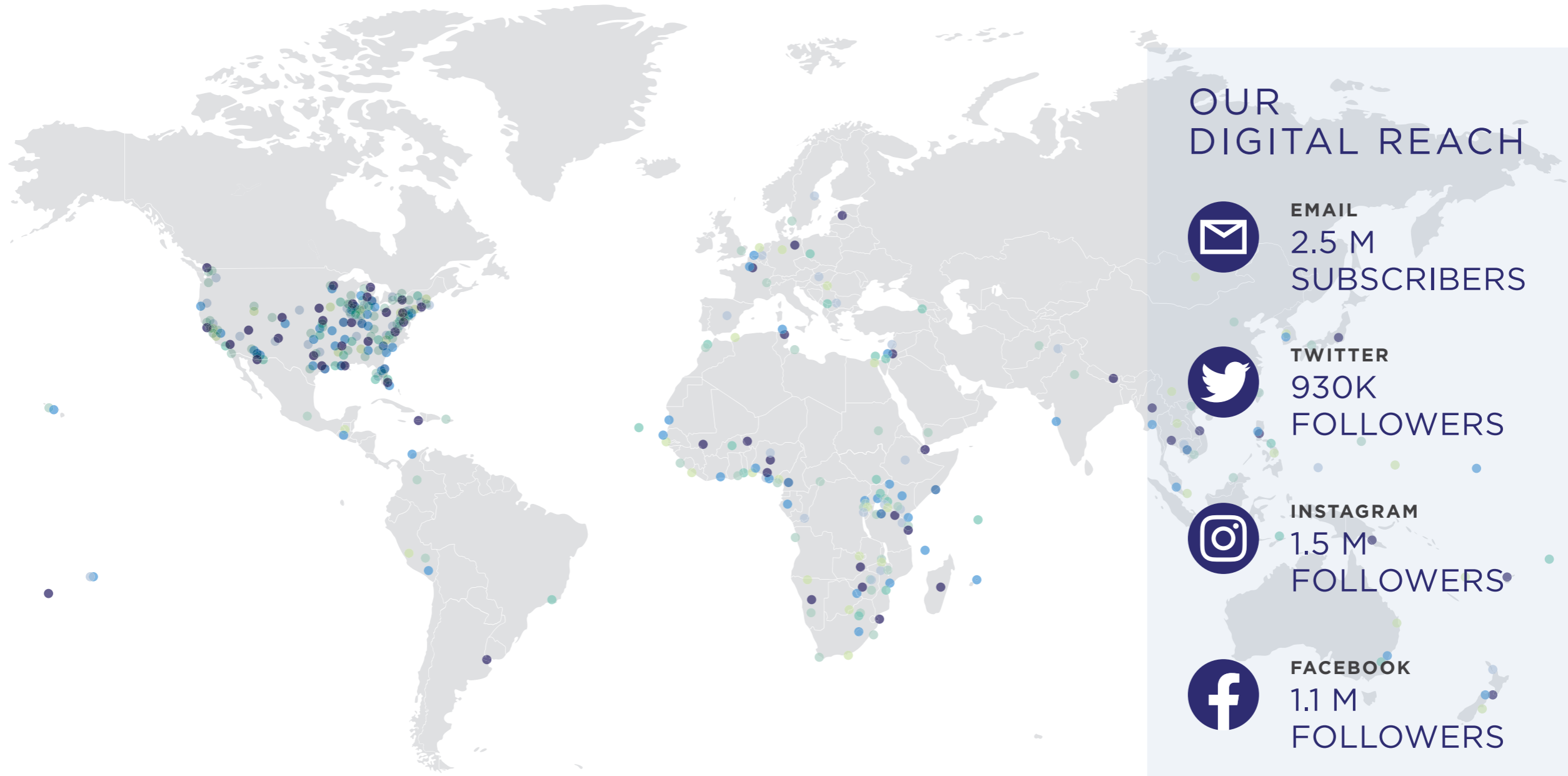
LET'S BRING HOPE HOME.



President Obama's election in 2008 showed the world where a movement that begins on the South Side could lead. You can help us come together to lead that kind of change again. As the President said in his farewell address, we're also asking you to believe—not in our ability to bring about change, but in yours.

Everybody has a contribution to make; everyone has a gift that they can give to help make their communities better. If we all make that effort, there's reason for hope.

OUR GLOBAL NETWORK OF LEADERS



OUR DIGITAL REACH



EMAIL
2.5 M
SUBSCRIBERS



TWITTER
930K
FOLLOWERS



INSTAGRAM
1.5 M
FOLLOWERS



FACEBOOK
1.1 M
FOLLOWERS



OUR GLOBAL NETWORK OF LEADERS

TEN LEADERS TAKING UP THE TORCH

What connects every Obama Foundation program? It's simple: leadership. Whether it's our effort to give high school students in Chicago and Washington, D.C. their first glimpse of the working world, a Fellowship meant to catapult innovative changemakers into a new phase of their careers, or international programs that aim to connect promising young minds as they steer the future of their regions, our programs are about empowering people to step forward on behalf of their communities.

We'd like you to meet ten of these leaders. On the surface, these ten leaders seem vastly different. They vary in age and experience. Only a handful share a country, let alone a city. And they've all been touched by the Obama Foundation in very different ways. But they each have taken up a torch that President and Mrs. Obama have passed along—a commitment to lead, not for personal benefit, but for the communities they serve. And they all have become part of the large network of changemakers we are building across the globe.

For the past few years, we've worked to build the programs that support leaders like the ten featured here. We've selected cohorts of Fellows and Scholars who were already doing pathbreaking work, and helped propel their careers forward. We've launched year-long regional leadership programs in Africa and the Asia Pacific, and trained 18- to 25-year-olds to kick-start their community organizing careers in cities throughout the United States. We've invested in organizations doing cutting-edge work on behalf of communities of color. We've raised grassroots dollars for grassroots leaders educating girls around the world. President Obama has addressed young leaders on five continents, and he and Mrs. Obama have reached millions more digitally with urgent calls to lead. We've held Summits in Chicago and convenings on four continents.

But whether we host a six-month community leadership bootcamp in Chicago, a week-long convening in Johannesburg, or a day-long town hall in Berlin, our goal is to offer lessons that live on and help leaders make connections that last a lifetime.

You'll see those lessons and connections illustrated in these stories. And beyond the effect the Obama Foundation has had on these ten leaders, you'll see evidence that demonstrates the broader impact of our programs. In 2019, we developed evaluation plans for each of our programs and built a framework to measure their impact on our participants. We designed these evaluations to hold equity paramount—to ensure our programs benefit those whom we hope to serve, but also to include their voices in the collection, interpretation, and use of our findings.

We had always intended 2020 to be a time of reflection—to study the data we collected in order to refine our programs and heighten our impact. And then, the COVID-19 pandemic brought the world to a standstill. In the short-term, we're substituting virtual gatherings for many of the in-person convenings that were so core to our programming. But we're also using this interruption to conduct a more thorough review of our programs to drive the change we want to see in the world.

And we're continuing to tell stories. Stories of hope. Stories of compassion and impact. Stories of connection in a socially distanced world. Stories of community leadership.

“Social change starts with a story,” President Obama said. And we hope the stories of these ten leaders are just the first chapter in the change they'll lead in communities throughout the world.



ROCIO ORTEGA

COMMUNITY LEADERSHIP CORPS CHICAGO, US

Every ten years, census data determines how to divvy up nearly \$1 trillion in federal spending and ensures communities have the resources they need, from schools to housing and hospitals. When the data is off—like it was in Chicago in 2010—communities suffer. Rocio Ortega is making sure the 2020 Census counts.

Growing up in McKinley Park, a neighborhood on the Southwest Side of Chicago, 25-year-old Rocio Ortega experienced the consequences of the 2010 Census firsthand. In 2010, Chicago had one of the highest census non-response rates of any major US city—Census Bureau estimates suggest nearly 60,000 people were missed. Rocio’s community was part of the hard-to-count population in Chicago. “That’s thousands and thousands of dollars we didn’t receive,” she said.

Determined to change the outcome in 2020, Rocio joined forces with Oscar Sanchez, Jarol Rendon Jimenez, and Martha Armenta-Robles in June 2019, when they became members of our Community Leadership Corps. The program is an opportunity for people between the ages of 18 and 25 to address opportunities and challenges in their community. Over six months, Corps members form teams, hold meetings with their communities, and launch a neighborhood-based project.

“I think the reason we arrived at census awareness is because we all lived in neighborhoods within marginalized communities,” Rocio said. “All of us were pretty familiar with issues of inequity—what it’s like to grow up without access that other people might be more fortunate to have and how that affected our paths in terms of education, or just access to opportunities.”

While the team all grew up in undercounted neighborhoods, the project was personal for other reasons, too. “All of us are Latinx,” Rocio said, a community that has historically been undercounted.

Rocio’s team dedicated themselves to dispelling misunderstandings around the 2020 Census—particularly in immigrant and Latinx communities. They knew completing the census in hard-to-reach communities came down to trust, and as a new group, they realized their best chance of success was by working with existing organizations.

They partnered with another Community Leadership Corps alumna, Madeline Kinnaird, and her brother Zak, who had been hosting voter registration events through their initiative called Sincerely, Chicago. Their joint efforts culminated with a census outreach event on February 22. Individuals from over 26 Chicagoland neighborhoods joined to hear local organizations speak to the specific needs and challenges of hard-to-reach communities in Cook County.

A few weeks later, as the COVID-19 pandemic brought in-person outreach to a halt, the census awareness organizations Rocio’s team worked with changed course and moved their efforts to phone banking, text messages, social media challenges, and other virtual engagement.

Still, collaboration remains key, whether by partnering with other Community Leadership Corps members or with organizations that are continuing census communication efforts. “We’re going to get a lot further together,” Rocio said.



AARON PARKER

OBAMA YOUTH JOBS CORPS
CHICAGO, US

Aaron Parker thought he was attending a routine meeting to cap off his internship at the Obama Foundation. When a special guest dropped in, he got the surprise of a lifetime—and advice he'll carry with him forever.

Aaron Parker adjusted his tie, took a deep breath, and stepped into our Chicago headquarters with his head held high. The Hyde Park Academy High School senior was walking into his first day as an Obama Youth Jobs Corps intern.

One year later, he would walk out the same doors with new connections, skills—and a story of a surprise encounter with President Obama.

While most people confront first-day jitters over the course of their careers, Aaron showed up to his internship with a degree of confidence and calm. During his year with us, he mastered new software, worked on his time management skills, and improved his interpersonal communication and writing.

Aaron took advantage of everything the Obama Youth Jobs Corps offers, from one-on-one mentoring and post-high school planning to ongoing professional development and networking. He spent time learning from team members across our organization, which to his surprise, included President Obama.

In July, President Obama dropped into a meeting unannounced, sitting down with Aaron and 12 of his peers to talk about how important job training programs are to creating opportunities for young people across Chicago. He answered their questions and shared a comforting reminder that Aaron still carries with him today: “You have to fail to be successful.”

We teamed up with Urban Alliance, a national youth development nonprofit organization, to provide meaningful experiences like Aaron's to young people who call the South Side of Chicago home. At the halfway mark of the five-year program, the Obama Youth Jobs Corps has already served more than 100 Chicago Public Schools sophomores and juniors with year-long workforce readiness training and paid internships.

Urban Alliance's work to set underserved youth on a path to economic stability aligns with our mission to equip young leaders with the tools they need to create change in their lives and their communities. The Obama Youth Jobs Corps is just one of the programs we've launched to support our neighbors in Chicago ahead of building the Obama Presidential Center.

Aaron left our office eager to learn and grow, and he is currently working towards a degree in computer science and information technology at Olive Harvey College in Chicago. He still keeps in touch with his Foundation mentor, and he is putting everything he learned from the Obama Youth Jobs Corps to good use—but most importantly, he's doing it with a newfound trust in himself and his future.



SEAN WAIGHT

CIVIC ACTION RECOGNITION AWARDS
CHICAGO, US

Sean Waight’s mentors gave him guidance that changed his life. Now he’s seeking to help build doors of opportunity for other young people.

On a Wednesday morning last May, 300 people filtered into the Harold Washington Library in downtown Chicago. In a light-filled atrium, high school senior Sean Waight took the microphone to accept the Civic Action Recognition Award for Team TACTICS—an organization he helped start as a sophomore to bridge the gap between police officers and young teens in his community.

The Civic Action Recognition Awards are a collaboration with Chicago Public Schools to celebrate students like Sean, along with teachers, administrators, and community organizations who are dedicated to making our schools, education systems, and communities better.

A few weeks later, Sean graduated from Wendell Phillips Academy, a public high school in the Bronzeville neighborhood on the South Side of Chicago, where he was involved in everything from honors classes to JROTC to entering—and winning—a science fair for designing an electric skateboard. Standing on stage that day, Sean added another accolade to an already rich high school experience.

“I wanted to make sure I took advantage of any opportunity thrown my way,” he said. “We didn’t have a lot of faculty members. Those teachers put in work for us—which meant I had to give the same effort back.”

But Sean didn’t always have that same drive. As a freshman, he said his mindset was the complete opposite of the multi-hyphenate student achiever he became. He credits an academic counselor, Ms. Fleming, with intervening and laying a foundation for his high school experience.

Mentors like her taught him to “look beyond current difficulties and stick it out until the end.”

The encouragement Sean received from faculty put him on a new trajectory. And in 2017, when Robin Robinson, Director of Community Affairs at the Chicago Police Department, challenged students from 20 Chicago Public Schools to help design a process to build authentic relationships with members of law enforcement as part of the Aspen Challenge, his wheels started turning.

He and seven other students came up with Team TACTICS (Teens and Cops Together in Chicago Successfully) to address an issue they saw firsthand in their community: juvenile arrests in Chicago disproportionately affecting young people of color. After attending Chicago Alternative Policing Strategy meetings, they created a series of workshops for police officers and high school students to build trust and foster a culture of understanding. They ended up taking first place in the Aspen Challenge competition and presented their curriculum at the Aspen Ideas Festival in Colorado last June.

For Sean, the experience was bigger than any award. It was an opportunity to make a real difference in the place where he grew up. “We became more than a group of students,” he said. “We became the vehicle of change for our school.”

Now, Sean is preparing for his sophomore year at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, where he’s planning on majoring in industrial design. When asked about his advice for other young people, he shared a quote from Milton Berle, “If opportunity doesn’t knock, build a door”—a simple reminder that we all have the power to help create a brighter future for ourselves and our communities. Let’s build.



CHRIS GOINS

MY BROTHER'S KEEPER ALLIANCE
CHICAGO, US

Chris Goins knows firsthand what can happen when a community wraps its arms around boys and young men of color. Now, he's working to lead systemic shifts that give every child the same opportunities he had.

Chris Goins grew up in Greensboro, North Carolina, a community where he said support for boys and young men of color was constant. "I grew up around Black people who looked like me in elementary, middle, high school, and college," he said. "And I just did not know that another world existed. It was unbeknownst to me until I moved away from Greensboro how special of a place it really is."

In a city with a rich civil rights history and a state with a dozen historically Black colleges and universities, he was constantly exposed to positive Black role models who lifted him up and challenged him to think about his future. He believes that upbringing made a lasting difference in his life, and now wants to ensure all boys and young men of color receive that same support. It's an idea that he's carried into the work he does today as the Impact Community Leader of My Brother's Keeper Chicago and Chief Equity Officer at Thrive Chicago.

Chris' philosophy began to take shape in Cincinnati, while he was studying for a master's degree in urban educational leadership. As he worked on his thesis project—a Shark Tank-style competition to plan and develop a school—he took inspiration from Greensboro's supportive ecosystem in designing a supportive educational environment.

Not only did his plan win, he was able to put parts of that vision into practice at Butler College Prep, a charter school on the South Side of Chicago where he was hired as Founding Principal in 2013. The school, part of the Noble Network of Charter Schools, is 95 percent low-income and Black.



As Chris built a founding team for the school, he knew the staff needed to reflect the student population. He hired a staff that was predominantly Black and, in his tenure with the Noble Network, increased the percentage of people of color across all 16 of their campuses from one percent to 50 percent. “I’m really passionate about ending the crisis of only two percent of the American teaching force being men of color,” he said. Now, Chris is implementing his philosophies on education at a larger, systemic level. At Thrive Chicago, the anchor organization of Chicago’s My Brother’s Keeper chapter, he works with City Hall and several nonprofit organizations to lead a city-wide effort to prepare all of Chicago’s youth for a vibrant future.

President Obama launched My Brother’s Keeper in February 2014 as a call to action to address the persistent opportunity gaps facing boys and young men of color and to ensure all youth can reach their full potential. Since then, My Brother’s Keeper has grown into an Alliance that spans nearly 250 communities and organizations across the country.

In May of 2019, Thrive Chicago and the My Brother’s Keeper Alliance released the Chicago MBK Action Plan, “Being My Brother’s Keeper,” with insights drawn from focus groups with more than 200 young men of color from across the city.

Dozens of youth and community leaders continue to gather on a regular basis to ensure the MBK Chicago Action Plan goals are met—with inspiring results. Based on one of the Plan’s recommendations, Chicago Public Schools implemented a new curriculum specifically focused on helping boys and young men of color discover their purpose. The Plan also inspired the Chicago Department of Family and Support Services to release a new request to fund programs focused on mentoring and violence prevention efforts, creating a sustainable, multi-year funding stream for this vital work.

In addition to overseeing the implementation of the MBK Chicago Action Plan, Chris works closely with our Chicago Impact and Seed Partner Organizations, recipients of two-year investment grants from the Alliance. As a result of our partnership, an additional 300 young men of color are being served at three new schools with Youth Guidance’s Becoming a Man program. Lawndale Christian Legal Center and Little Village’s New Life Centers have increased their capacity to conduct youth outreach. BUILD Chicago is recruiting and training participants for a new mentoring apprenticeship program. And, a new performing cohort has been recruited by the South Shore Drill Team.

The impact the My Brother’s Keeper Alliance makes at the community level is something Chris says is more important than ever. As the COVID-19 pandemic hits systematically disadvantaged communities of color hardest, Chris and MBK Chicago are focused on helping students heal and prepare to reenter schools when they eventually open, while thinking about how to best support educators and mentors. “Mentors and mentoring organizations have an immense task facing them,” he said. “They’re going to be very critical in leading the healing.”

Chris grew up knowing he would be an educator, and that North Star led him from his hometown to championing equity in ours. As Chris continues to help boys and young men of color find their purpose, we’ll continue supporting his—because everyone deserves a clear path toward opportunity.



KEITH WATTLEY

OBAMA FELLOWS
OAKLAND, US

As a bipartisan consensus emerges to offer clemency to people in prison for nonviolent offenses, Obama Fellow Keith Wattley is asking an uncomfortable question: Do we have the capacity to forgive those who commit violent crimes as well?

What stands between more than 6,000 people and their freedom is a story.

Of the 35,000 people serving life sentences in California state prisons in 2019, over 6,000 earned their chance to sit before the State's Board of Parole Hearings and argue their case for release. But for the vast majority who are unable to afford private representation, the most preparation they can hope for is one meeting with a state-appointed lawyer and the advice shared among people behind the walls. They've been offered a path to freedom, but they have no map to navigate it.

For nearly 14 years, it has been Obama Fellow Keith Wattley's mission to chart that path. After working as a staff attorney at a nonprofit law firm, Keith recognized that those serving life sentences, nearly all of whom were involved in violent crimes, were a forgotten population.

"They were lost in prison," he said. "So many people received some of the harshest, knee-jerk, criminal sanctions we could impose—mandatory minimum sentences, gang enhancements, those kinds of things—but they were stuck in prison because they didn't have help understanding their actions. They didn't have help changing their lives. They didn't have help dealing with the parole board."

He started a nonprofit in 2006, UnCommon Law, to provide pro bono support to people throughout the parole process, a timeline that can take years. The firm provides legal guidance, but they also offer counseling to help clients wrestle with emotional issues.

It is this difficult soul-searching—the navigation of complex histories, childhood traumas, systemic injustice, and past crimes—that helps shape a client’s “arc of transformation,” the narrative that UnCommon Law prepares them to share with parole commissioners.

And the transformation is real. On average, only 20 percent of parole applicants successfully make their case to California’s Board of Parole. The success rates for clients of UnCommon Law is over 60 percent. They’ve helped 252 people find their way to freedom. Ninety-nine percent have remained free.

But we didn’t choose Keith as part of our inaugural class of Obama Fellows because of the service he provides his clients—not solely. We chose Keith, out of nearly 20,000 applications we received, because he is trying to expand the circle of who we care for in a society. He’s not only fighting for individuals; he’s trying to transform a system that says we must confine them.

After decades of tough-on-crime policies designed to punish people, a bipartisan belief in the need for criminal justice reform has taken hold in America. But lost amidst the campaign to reduce or eliminate the sentences of people convicted of nonviolent offenses is concern for the fate of those who’ve committed violent crimes. By denying them the same chances at release, Keith fears we’re reinforcing a false narrative: that those who commit violent crimes are fundamentally different from those who commit nonviolent ones.

“There’s this false sense that people in prison are either violent criminals or nonviolent criminals,” he says. “That’s not real. Consider a drug deal that might have landed someone in prison for a drug crime—therefore a nonviolent crime. That drug deal is really just one worst-case scenario away from being a violent crime. If a drug deal goes bad and someone pulls out a gun, somebody gets shot and killed. The circumstances that led all parties to that drug deal are often the same, yet we pretend they’re different kinds of people. I don’t think they are.”

For a country still developing its compassion for those convicted of nonviolent offenses, Keith’s argument can be challenging. But since his selection as a Fellow, he’s found greater recognition for his work and a broader audience for his ideas.

After the US Congress began debating the First Step Act, a major piece of criminal justice reform legislation aimed at nonviolent drug offenses, Keith penned a New York Times op-ed advocating for alternatives to incarceration for all inmates. Then in 2019, UnCommon Law received a multi-million dollar grant from the City of Oakland to create therapeutic communities within a maximum security state prison—to train people in prisons to do the work his organization now does outside of them.

UnCommon Law has raised enough money to triple its budget and hire more staff. Keith recently won the James Irvine Leadership Award, recognizing people who are helping the state of California find innovative solutions to pressing challenges, and the firm was awarded a California ChangeLawyers Grant to hire its fourth attorney.

This is what the Obama Fellows program hopes to do: offer a bigger platform and meaningful resources to leaders who have spent years fighting on behalf of communities that deserve better. By offering Keith and 39 other talented Fellows executive coaching, workshops to help them sharpen fundraising pitches, and communications training, we hope to accelerate their success, secure the future of their work, and help their voice find an audience.

Keith’s experience is remarkable, but it’s not unique. Since launching the program in 2018, we’ve seen our Obama Fellows secure grants, win awards, and raise the profile of their work and their communities. And critically, we’ve seen them support and advise each other, sharing wisdom and guidance as they launch their own arcs of transformation.



NIMA TISDALL

EUROPE TOWN HALL
COPENHAGEN, DENMARK

Fresh fish is big business in Copenhagen, but Nima Tisdall, an entrepreneur who joined our town hall in Berlin with President Obama, is building a sustainable future for fishermen by thinking small.

The small Danish town of Snekkersten sits on the country's northern coast, an hour's walk from the Kronborg castle that served as the setting for "Hamlet." For centuries, it thrived off the catches of local fishermen who patrolled the strait between Denmark and Sweden, bringing in nets full of cod and herring, plaice and turbot.

But as Nima Tisdall grew older, she began to notice the local fishermen of Snekkersten shutting down their operations, driven out of business by the industrial trawlers, fisheries, and corporate fishmongers that sacrificed sustainability for efficiency. Small harbors like the one that had anchored Snekkersten for centuries shut down across Denmark.

"Despite actions to combat overfishing, industrial ships still go out and fish an obscene amount in an unsustainable way," Nima said. "Fish were being caught in one end of the country, driven across the country to be sold, and then redistributed back out. At the same time, they're driving down the price of fish, making it harder for local fishermen to compete."

After leaving Snekkersten to study business in Copenhagen, the fate of those fishermen stuck with Nima. But it wasn't until her friend, an American expat named Christine Herbert, pointed out that local fish was both expensive and of poor quality that Nima began thinking about how to address the situation. Copenhagen was emerging as a global dining capital, one whose chefs prided themselves on quality, local ingredients and sustainable methods. If she could just connect these New Nordic chefs with local fishermen, she realized she could help both parties succeed.



Together with Christine, Nima founded the startup Blue Lobster, a virtual marketplace that allows local fishermen to record their catches and sell them in real time, ocean-to-table. After launching the platform in the fall of 2018, the pair began visiting restaurants and harbors to make their first sales, hoping to match demand with supply. Though they had some initial success, they often encountered choppy waters and dismissive attitudes. “When two young girls are coming up to you on the dock, it can be quite tough,” Nima said.

Then, in April of 2019, we invited Nima to travel to Berlin to hear President Obama address 300 young leaders in our first town hall in Europe. While the President met with a smaller group of young leaders on an earlier trip to Europe, the town hall would be an opportunity for hundreds of leaders across the Continent to ask him questions directly about the region’s future and the role they could play in shaping it.

Before traveling to Berlin, we also asked Nima to participate in a photo essay. The photos—a day in the life of running Blue Lobster—showed Nima and Christine receiving fresh catches of lumpfish and cod from fishermen in Copenhagen before transporting them to a restaurant in the trendy Nørrebro neighborhood where chefs prepare and plate them. The post went live on Obama.org, then went viral in Denmark.

Doors that were previously closed began to open, and the skeptical looks Nima used to receive in the harbor when pitching her platform disappeared. “Fishermen are just skeptical humans, and you have to go out and really persuade them every single time,” she said. “But that was the first time we actually experienced fishermen coming to us saying, ‘We want to be part of it.’ It just brought immediate credibility to the cause.”

And once Nima arrived in Berlin, her world—and her future plans for Blue Lobster—broadened. She made connections with other leaders the Foundation brought together from Nordic countries who encouraged her to reach out once her platform was ready to expand. She also received the encouragement she needed to dream big and stay hopeful.

“In Denmark there is definitely a feeling of *don’t overthink things and don’t overreach*,” she said. “It can be difficult to dream big enough. So it was really inspirational being with people who are dreaming larger than life and being able to dream with them... You look around the gathering and you think, *Okay, the world is going to be a better place thanks to so many of the humans in this room.*”

Since the town hall, Blue Lobster has grown exponentially, with sales doubling or tripling month after month, allowing Nima and Christine to hire a team of seven. But their goal isn’t just to sell fish; it’s to change an industry. “Fishermen who fish sustainably today actually get less money per catch,” Nima said. “They get punished for having smaller catches.” By encouraging consumers to put a premium on fresh, sustainably-caught fish, she’s creating an incentive she hopes will push the entire industry toward smaller, local, more responsible catches.

As the COVID-19 pandemic unfolded throughout the world in 2020, Denmark joined other countries in shuttering restaurants, essentially halting Blue Lobster’s sales. But like any worthy startup, Nima and her team are pivoting, accelerating plans to sell and safely deliver fresh fish directly to consumers, rather than to chefs. While Blue Lobster’s sales have yet to return to pre-crisis levels, consumer interest has been high. And with an opportunity to communicate directly with consumers about sustainability, Nima’s dreams for transforming the fishing industry remain big.



NINA FORGWE

LEADERS: AFRICA
YAOUNDÉ, CAMEROON

Nina Forgwe believes every person has the right to a life free from terror. For millions like her in Cameroon, that isn't always the case.

For years, Nina Forgwe's English-speaking community in French-dominant Cameroon has been ensnared in a linguistic conflict that's tearing the country apart—all while Boko Haram has devastated its northern region. Nina witnessed political instability lead to violence that killed thousands and left even more displaced. The experience galvanized her to build a more peaceful future for generations to come.

Her organization, Teagan Alternatives, is countering radicalization in Cameroon through education, youth empowerment, and peacebuilding. While her organization saw early successes, Nina knew she needed more support to scale her impact. That's what led her to the Leaders: Africa program.

After being selected as one of 200 Obama Leaders and traveling to South Africa for the program's signature kick-off convening, Nina met another leader working on violence prevention in Cameroon, Emily Miki. Emily founded and runs the Denis Miki Foundation, a community development organization that provides humanitarian assistance across the country.

Over the course of the week-long event, Nina and Emily dove into interactive skill-building and storytelling workshops with the rest of the Leaders: Africa cohort. They attended plenary sessions with inspiring speakers from across the region and explored how ethical and values-based leadership can expand their impact while keeping the communities they care for at the center of their work.

Before the week ended, the Leaders rolled up their sleeves to give back to the local Johannesburg community during a day of service and broke bread at a traditional South African braai dinner. Each step of the way, Nina and Emily bonded over their shared experiences coping with the ongoing conflict in Cameroon and their passion for supporting their communities.

When she returned home after the convening, Nina got right to work. She recreated the storytelling and leadership workshops we facilitated in Johannesburg to help the children in her community share their own experiences and begin to heal from past traumas.

Then, she did something at the core of our Leaders program: She reached out to Emily and asked for help starting a new initiative to care for the families that fled the nation's capital, Yaoundé, to seek refuge. They called it the "Giving the Gift of Education" initiative.

To date, the duo has supported dozens of displaced children ages 10 to 16 through trauma healing, de-radicalization, and counseling sessions, while giving them a path back to the classroom.

In its second year, the Leaders: Africa program has focused on doing even more to encourage the kind of connection Nina and Emily have made, beyond the in-person gathering. By inviting a few Leaders from the inaugural cohort to return as mentors and facilitators for the current class, our team has stirred an even larger ripple effect of learning and collaboration.

The program has expanded its virtual programming. Leaders are connected digitally, and this year's online content now includes webinars on grant-finding and writing, along with diversity and inclusion, personalized office hours and coaching, and other tangible skills and support that Leaders tell us they need most. Leaders can also sign up to receive individualized coaching and mentoring from Foundation staff and affiliates on a broad range of issues, from governance to recruiting volunteers. The program team also facilitates individual connections and introductions based on Leader requests.

When Nina reached out to Emily to create a shared solution to a shared challenge, she proved an idea core to our mission: that we can accomplish more together than we can alone. We want every emerging leader we work with to connect with other like-minded changemakers to grow their impact. And it's why we will continue supporting people like Nina and Emily across the African continent.

VIETNAM



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TÂY THI NGUYEN

GIRLS OPPORTUNITY ALLIANCE
HO CHI MINH CITY, VIETNAM

Tây Thi Nguyen had to overcome daunting odds to pursue her education and become a teacher. With the support of the Girls Opportunity Alliance, she's fighting to make it easier for a new generation of girls to live out their dreams.

On a warm Monday morning in December, 26-year-old Tây Thi Nguyen arrived at Cân Giuộc High School, an hour outside Ho Chi Minh City, Vietnam. Tây Thi is an English teacher, but on this day, there would be no lesson plan and no students to teach. The schedule wouldn't be routine—but then again, there had never been anything ordinary about going to school for Tây Thi.

Tây Thi grew up in a remote village in the Mekong River Delta, a low-lying coastal area that's the heart of rice production in Vietnam. The eighth of nine children, it wasn't easy for her family to make ends meet, and even the youngest kids were expected to pitch in. So when Tây Thi finished primary school—the only mandatory schooling in Vietnam—her parents demanded she drop out and help support the family.

Although her parents needed the money, Tây Thi desperately wanted to learn—and maybe become a teacher herself someday. So she kept up her studies, and her parents kept up their attempts to end them. In eighth grade, her mom burned all of her school books. And in twelfth grade, when Tây Thi had new books, her mom burned those, too.

Each time, an organization called Room to Read stepped in to provide resources to help Tây Thi stay in school. The nonprofit, dedicated to advancing gender equality through education, helped her buy new books and uniforms, covered her school fees, and even provided a bike for her to get to school. As she reached graduation, Tây Thi studied for and took her college entrance exams in secret. She aced them. In 2014, Tây Thi graduated from Long An Teacher Training Center with the teaching degree she had dreamed of as a girl.

Now, she teaches English to students in her community. And in her own family, she's advocated successfully for education for the next generation, encouraging her younger brother to follow her path to college. Her parents have had a change of heart after seeing how Tây Thi built a better life for herself.

On that anything-but-ordinary Monday at Cân Giuộc High School, Tây Thi found herself sitting at a table next to First Lady Michelle Obama, sharing her remarkable story of getting an education against the odds. Mrs. Obama—along with actresses Julia Roberts, Lana Condor, and Veronica Ngo, YouTuber Liza Koshy, and Today Show host Jenna Bush Hager—was there meeting with current students and graduates of Room to Read, one of the many organizations the Girls Opportunity Alliance supports around the world.

While Tây Thi was able to fulfill her dreams through education, more than 98 million adolescent girls around the world are not in school. That's a lot of empty desks—and a lot of dreams that are being cut short. And that's why the Girls Opportunity Alliance is determined to inspire people around the world to take action to help adolescent girls and the grassroots leaders working to educate them.

In its second year, the Girls Opportunity Alliance expanded its reach and support to organizations across the world. In 2019, our crowdfunding platform supported organizations like Room to Read in Vietnam; the Sacred Valley Project in Peru, which helps indigenous girls in remote communities access education; and WISER Girls, an organization in Kenya supporting STEM education for girls. From Peru to Cambodia and India, we're seeing measurable progress in our efforts to empower adolescent girls across the world.

When Tây Thi got her education, she changed her life and lifted up her family, her community, and her country. We're more committed than ever to helping millions of girls like Tây Thi achieve their potential—because the future of the world is only as bright as our girls.



SKYE RIGGS

LEADERS: ASIA-PACIFIC
SYDNEY, AUSTRALIA

Skye Riggs spent years encouraging Australia's youth to vote. After a chance meeting at one of our convenings, she's now encouraging them to lead.

It's long been a tradition for President Obama to celebrate the end of the year with his family in Hawai'i. Last year, we put him to work.

In January 2019, he joined a cohort of 21 community leaders from 16 nations and territories from across the Asia Pacific for a hands-on workshop to help design a leadership program for the region. Together with Foundation supporters and staff, they discussed the complexities of prominent issues the region faces, like climate change, indigenous rights, education, and accountability.

The group explored how cultural norms and traditions typically require young leaders to offer deference to previous generations, even as they push to evolve the status quo. And they emphasized the importance of including leaders from Pacific Islands in the dialogue about the region's future, noting that young leaders from these countries often feel excluded from discussions and programs focused on the broader region. By the end of the workshop, they developed a set of recommendations that became the foundation of a regional program, Leaders: Asia-Pacific.

Eleven months later, 200 leaders from 33 nations and territories across the region traveled to Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia, to begin their journey in the first-ever Leaders: Asia-Pacific program. One of them was Australian Skye Riggs.

Before joining the program, Skye led a successful career helping nonprofits and government initiatives ramp up their engagement before turning her attention to voter turnout. After finding herself disengaged from campaigns in Australia's 2013 federal election, Skye discovered that an overwhelming number of young Australians felt similarly. So she founded Y Vote, an organization intent on making it easier for young people to engage with politics and understand the impact of their vote.

Over the course of the week-long convening, President and Mrs. Obama—along with Tony Fernandes, Oyun Sanjaasuren, Tim Brown, Tong Yee, and other prominent speakers and thought leaders from the region—spoke with Skye and her peers about their experiences creating and implementing new solutions, as well as the importance of values-based leadership. In keeping with our commitment to service, the Leaders also spent a day building desks and other supplies for a school in the local community.

During the convening, Skye met Tim Middlemiss, another Australian Leader. It didn't take long for them to realize that their worldviews overlapped, their skills were complementary, and that working together would amplify their impact.

In its first year, the program has fostered intra-cohort connections like the one between Skye and Tim to help Leaders build meaningful relationships with those working in similar fields across the region. The program also hosts monthly virtual speaker series, online trainings, and collaborative events where Leaders can connect with one another.

Skye and Tim had a shared vision of supporting young people to harness their agency in civic systems, energize them about political processes, and empower them to contribute to positive change in every sphere of their lives—and they gathered input from their fellow Leaders to determine how they could best execute it. What started as a conversation in the foyer of the Leaders: Asia-Pacific convening is now Ripple, an organization that seeks to equip purpose-driven young people from every corner of Australia through tailored civic experiences as well as career and community opportunities.

Combining Skye and Tim's networks, Ripple now serves a community of over 10,000 young people between the ages of 18 and 25 in Australia, giving them the support they need to build thriving communities. They've also piloted a ten-week leadership development and community building program for emerging leaders in five local government areas. None of it would have been possible without their determination—and the bond they formed at Leaders: Asia-Pacific.



JUAN CARLOS MONTERREY- GÓMEZ

OBAMA SCHOLARS
PANAMA CITY, PANAMA

Most people might expect to make a few friends in grad school, but Obama Scholar Juan Carlos Monterrey-Gómez met five other Obama Scholars who changed his life—and just might help him change Panama’s constitution.

Growing up in El Pájaro, a small rural area in Panama, Juan Carlos Monterrey-Gómez didn’t know why his surroundings were often brown and craggy. He didn’t know why his dad lost cattle and struggled to keep the family’s crops alive or why the community was stricken with drought each year. When he sat down for his first course in international development at Tulane University in New Orleans years later, he finally began to realize the truth. He felt as though his professor was “was explaining my childhood day by day,” Juan said. “I didn’t know people studied poor people.”

Juan went on to earn a bachelor’s degree in the economics of poverty and inequality, but when he returned home, his path forward was less clear. He ended up taking a position at the Ministry of Environment working on climate change—a subject he knew little about at the time. But the experience that helped him understand his own community and how he could translate his ideas into action.

Juan quickly became a climate wonk, drafting policy to empower young people, indigenous groups, and other communities that are often excluded from climate discussions. In just a few months, his drive and impressive work landed him on the delegation to the Geneva Climate Change Conference, and culminated in him joining Panama’s delegation to the United Nations Climate Talk as part of the negotiations of the Paris Agreement. He was 23 at the time.



Eager to expand his already-impactful work, Juan applied and was selected as one of the 25 inaugural Obama Scholars at the University of Chicago's Harris School of Public Policy. There, he earned a master's degree in international development and policy after completing a year-long curriculum that combined academic learning with intensive, Foundation-led leadership development sessions and trainings with former Obama administration officials and issue area experts. He took a deep-dive into deep dish pizza and the history of the South Side, too.

As the academic year progressed and his confidence in his own leadership grew, so did his notebook of ideas on how to push the Panamanian government to prioritize climate change. In the spirit of global collaboration that underscores the Scholars program, Juan shared his ideas with the cohort and asked for their feedback.

That's when Juliana Betancourt, a Scholar working on peacebuilding in Colombia, challenged Juan to think bigger. "One day she told me, 'If you want to push this forward at the highest level, you need to put it in the constitution.' I had never thought about that. Of course it needed to be added to the constitution." Panama was in the midst of a constitutional reform process at the time, and one of Juan's old colleagues was the environment delegate on the commission.

As more incredibly well-timed connections and details fell into place, he turned to Kim Brown, a Scholar who happened to have a decade of experience working on constitutional reform processes in Africa. With her help, Juan and Juliana—along with Scholars Mario Mazic from Croatia and Fatima Zaman from the United Kingdom—got to work drafting the formal set of recommendations, all while preparing for their final exams. At the Scholars' final gathering in May 2019, Juan presented this work to the entire cohort as the action plan he'd implement upon his return to Panama in June.

Then one night, Juan got a call from an environmental lawyer working on the package and was told that the President-elect wanted it expedited. Edits would close the next day; if he wanted the set of climate recommendations included, he would have to move quickly. After pulling an all-nighter with his cohort and contacts in the government, the article was added to the reform package the very next morning. The climate article was introduced to the Panamanian Senate in July 2019 after

receiving overwhelming support from the President-elect. If passed, their article would represent the most progressive climate change language in any constitution in the world.

As the proposals moved through the legislature, protests against provisions unrelated to climate sidelined the reform package, leading the President to call for a national dialogue to draft a new constitution. But Juan and Kim's work continues. The pair recognized they needed a way to export the progress of their work in Panama around the world and mobilize broader support for these kinds of efforts.

Currently, the two are working to start a new think tank called Climate Resilient. They plan to invite five of the Scholars who helped draft the initial climate article to be founding members of the organization. As they charge forward, we are connecting Juan with global NGOs, UN leadership, and former Obama administration advisors for guidance. The intensive training, network building, and leadership development the Scholars program offers created an ecosystem of changemakers who were empowered and poised to enact this type of change at the right time.

Connections like the ones Juan made aren't unique to just him and his fellow University of Chicago Scholars. It is a pattern we are seeing across the inaugural Scholars cohort as they scale their work regionally, receive increased recognition as leaders in their fields, and advance their work through new connections and approaches gained over a year of deep reflection and refinement.

The intense experience of moving through leadership programming, weekly high-level sessions led by experts in the Scholars' fields, deep community connection, and increased belief in their own abilities has created a shift in our Scholars' worldview and a greater understanding of systemic change—and power—on a global scale.

"No one changes the world alone," President Obama has said. When Juan first met his fellow Scholars during his arrival in Chicago, he would never have expected that he'd join a peacebuilder, a constitutional law expert, and two other peers to change the world together.

"There's a beauty in how people can come together at just the right time."



THE OBAMA FOUNDATION SUMMIT PLACES REVEAL OUR PURPOSE

“I felt a sense of injustice,” Mrs. Obama said, her voice hinting at the pain of what she witnessed as a young girl. There, on stage at our third Obama Foundation Summit, she and her brother, Craig Robinson, recalled their upbringing in Chicago’s South Shore neighborhood. “Families like ours—upstanding families like ours—we were doing everything we were supposed to do... But as we moved in, White folks moved out.”

“You could feel people disinvesting in you,” she said. “You could feel it in the schools.”

“And you could feel it in the parks,” her brother said.

But the Obama Presidential Center is a chance to change that, Mrs. Obama explained; a chance to invest in the South Side’s potential the way previous investments on Chicago’s North Side expanded its waterfront and park space.

“This vision isn’t just about the Obama Presidential Center,” she said. “It’s about the South Side of Chicago. It’s about our neighborhood and community.”

Just a few short miles from where Mrs. Obama and her brother grew up in a small South Shore bungalow, and an even shorter distance from the site of the future Obama Presidential Center, we gathered hundreds of our program participants, Foundation supporters, and special guests to honor their work and celebrate a simple truth: Places reveal our purpose.

That idea—that the places we inhabit shape the change we want to make in the world—is central to President and Mrs. Obama’s lives. Chicago’s long legacy of community-driven activism shaped both the trajectory of their careers and their belief in how change happens: not imposed from the top-down but built up steadily from the grassroots. Not driven by forces teetering above but by everyday people, firmly rooted in place.



The Summit was our opportunity to share our belief in place-based change and paint a vision of the type of gatherings, conversations, performances, and possibilities the future Obama Presidential Center might bring.

But before the Summit began, we wanted our attendees to get a feel for the place we call home. We partnered with Chicago Cares, a local volunteer organization, to organize service projects at the DuSable Museum of African American History and Chicago Youth Programs, two South Side community institutions. We curated a dinner featuring dishes from notable Chicago chefs, invited our favorite TV president, Julia Louis-Dreyfus, to talk about her early days at Second City improv, and even secured legendary DJ Alan King to spin an epic set of Chicago house.

The next morning—after an optional fun run and yoga session—we welcomed Summit attendees to the South Side campus of the Illinois Institute of Technology. Dancers from the Joffrey Ballet joined by poets from Young Chicago Authors opened the Summit with a rousing performance that married dance and spoken word. Diallo Riddle and Bashir Salahuddin, the stars of Comedy Central’s “South Side,” welcomed the seated audience, and the hundreds of thousands tuning in digitally, to the community. The artist Theaster Gates and the filmmaker Ava DuVernay discussed the influence that rootedness has on their respective works.

Just after Mrs. Obama and her brother took the stage, we broke for lunch and a series of smaller, more intimate breakout sessions. The breakouts allowed Summit attendees to connect more closely with each other, while engaging with experts on a range of specific topics. President Obama’s former campaign manager David Plouffe talked about the role young people have to play in civic engagement. Olympians Tommie Smith and Charles Barkley spoke about the intersection of sports and activism. And Obama Presidential Center architects Tod Williams and Billie Tsien walked attendees through a scale model of their designs.

After lunch, a duet welcomed participants back to the Summit stage. Wilco’s Jeff Tweedy strummed the guitar while Mavis Staples’ iconic voice rang through the halls. Following the performance, actor Billy Porter joined director Lulu Wang in a conversation about the importance of community representation in art. The legendary activist Dolores Huerta joined Oscar Sanchez, a member of our Community Leadership Corps, to discuss the influence her upbringing had on her decades-long fight for workers’ rights.

And throughout the day, our program participants took the stage, one-by-one, to deliver speeches about their own work. De’Andre Brown spoke about the impact the Yonkers chapter of My Brother’s Keeper had on his trajectory, mentoring him through a difficult start in high school, and helping him become a scholarship student at New York University. Scholar Samira Koujok delivered a powerful spoken word piece about how a family history upended by war inspires her activism today. Mimi Gonzalez, a Community Leadership Corps member, spoke about how her community in Hartford helped her cope with her own trauma and how she helps others do the same. And Awah Francisca Mbuli, an Africa Leader from Cameroon, shared her story of escaping domestic servitude and her work to help other victims of human trafficking do the same.

It was these four young leaders who joined President Obama for the final session of the Summit, a conversation moderated by actor and activist Yara Shahidi. While fielding questions from these young leaders, President Obama spoke about his vision for the future upon leaving the White House. “When Michelle and I decided what we were going to do next,” he said, “the most important thing we figured we could do was pass the baton to as many people as possible.”

But you can’t understand how to change the world if you don’t understand how to change a country, he explained. You can’t change a country if you don’t know how to change a city. And you can’t change a city unless you know how to change a community. “So we have got to have a place,” he said. A place that can help people define their purpose.

“This vision isn’t just about the Obama Presidential Center, it’s about the South Side of Chicago. It’s about our neighborhood and community.”

MICHELLE OBAMA

OUR SUPPORTERS

This work wouldn't be possible without your support. We are proud stewards of your gifts. We wanted to highlight two of our generous supporters, but for a complete list of donors, visit [obama.org/contributors](https://www.obama.org/contributors).

“It’s a chance for the people who live here to have access to the opportunity to live their best lives and be their best selves... and I wanted to be a part of that.”

YOLANDA RAHMAN, OBAMA FOUNDATION SUPPORTER
CHICAGO, US

Picture springtime in Chicago, a few years from now: gardens are full of sweet-smelling flowers, the skies have traded their wintertime grey for a bright blue, and cafes and restaurants start bringing their tables and chairs outdoors throughout the city. As sunshine floods Jackson Park on the South Side of Chicago, smiling children run through the playground and up the sledding hill while their parents take in the view of the Chicago skyline from the Sky Room atop the Obama Presidential Center Museum.

For Yolanda Rahman, it's not only easy to picture this scene; she's helping to bring it to life. Raised in a suburb west of the city, Yolanda was inspired to give to the Obama Foundation as soon as she found out the Obama Presidential Center would be based in Chicago. “It’s a chance for the people who live here to have access to the opportunity to live their best lives and be their best selves... and I wanted to be a part of that.”

Yolanda's recurring donations caught our attention earlier this year—she's been supporting our efforts by mailing in checks since the very beginning. We wanted to understand why.

To Yolanda, the Obama Presidential Center cements what she's always known to be true: Chicago is one of the greatest cities in the world (even if the winter does get a little chilly). She says she supports the Obama Foundation because she knows it will be more than a building—it will be a physical embodiment of the character of her world-class city that is open to all Chicagoans.

As a professional fundraiser for health-focused nonprofits and academic institutions, Yolanda has long understood the importance of contributions like her own. And she appreciates that individual donations, just like civic contributions to our communities, add up over time to deliver meaningful change.

Our mission also spoke to Yolanda's personal philosophy. She believes that anyone can make a difference, especially if they celebrate their diversity and work together. Bringing together people from different walks of life isn't just something to be celebrated, it's something that will make her city—and the world—a better place.

When Yolanda envisions the Obama Presidential Center in the springtime, she sees herself and her family there walking the grounds. Together with her husband and two children, she hopes that donating to the Foundation is just the beginning of her family's traditions at the Center.

Whether it's exploring the museum exhibits with her son, taking long walks through the parkland with her daughter, or even volunteering as a docent (during the summer months only, she was quick to add), Yolanda sees the Obama Presidential Center as a place her family will be able to gather and feel proud of the city they call home.

OUR SUPPORTERS

“Our support for the Obama Presidential Center stems from our appreciation of the contributions of President Obama and Mrs. Obama to the world.”

JAMES CROWN, CROWN FAMILY PHILANTHROPIES
CHICAGO, US

Tikkun olam. Translated from Hebrew, the phrase literally means “repair of the world.” But as a concept, it is much bigger. It’s the idea that we shoulder the weight, not only of our own wellbeing, but for the wellbeing of society at large.

That idea has been at the heart of Crown Family Philanthropies’ work for generations—to take care of their hometown of Chicago and attend to the wellbeing of communities throughout the world. And as the COVID-19 outbreak hits our most vulnerable communities hardest, repairing the world is more vital than ever.

The Crown family’s story starts in the late 19th century, when Arie and Ida Crown left Lithuania in search of a better life for their family. The Crowns landed in Chicago, where they established a home and instilled values of shared responsibility in their seven children. Their sons, Henry and Irving Crown, built one of the most successful companies in America: Material Service Corporation. As their success grew, those same values served as a guide for the family’s work in philanthropy.

For over 70 years, the Crown family has given back to the country and communities that provided them with opportunities to prosper. Today, Crown Family Philanthropies supports causes related to education, the environment, global health, health and human services, and Jewish giving. When the Obama Foundation began its work in Chicago, Crown Family Philanthropies made a generous contribution to the Obama Presidential Center—a place they believe will bring talented, diverse leaders together to drive positive social change in Chicago and beyond.

“Our support for the Obama Presidential Center stems from our appreciation of the contributions of President Obama and Mrs. Obama to the world,” said James Crown, a member of the Crown Family Philanthropies Board, and the CEO and Chairman of Henry Crown and Company. “It also recognizes the importance of the Obama Foundation and Center to the city of Chicago, and our shared commitment to supporting diverse voices and changemakers.”

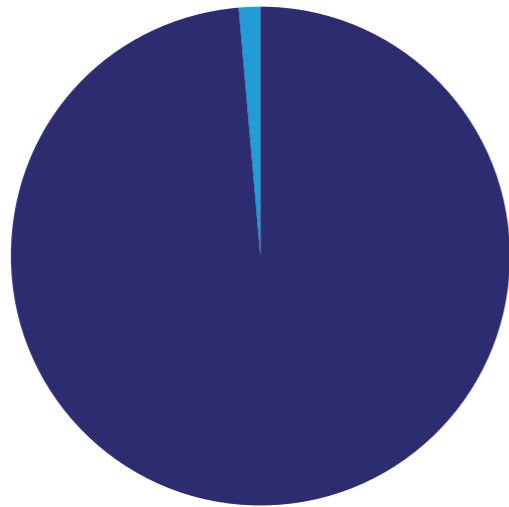
Today, four generations of the Crown family are committed to making social impact together, led by 95-year-old patriarch, Lester Crown. And whether Crown Family Philanthropies is working to ensure that all Chicago Public Schools students have an opportunity for success after high school, seeking solutions to end homelessness, or helping Jewish families deepen their connection to their spirituality and community, they know they can’t solve these problems alone—they believe we’re all stronger when we work together.

“It’s true in good times, and it’s especially true in challenging times, like amidst this coronavirus pandemic, that we work with other leaders on shared blueprints for positive social impact,” said Evan Hochberg, President of Crown Family Philanthropies.

It’s that collaborative nature that drives them to support our mission to empower emerging leaders. Like the Obama Foundation, Crown Family Philanthropies believes in lifting up community leaders and giving them support to scale their impact. And like President and Mrs. Obama, the Crown family is committed to giving back to the city that gave them everything. Repairing the world may take a global effort, but it begins at home.

OUR FINANCIALS

We spend every day trying to live up to our mission and we are grateful for the support and partnership of individuals, corporations, institutions, and foundations who share our sense of urgency and purpose.



REVENUE

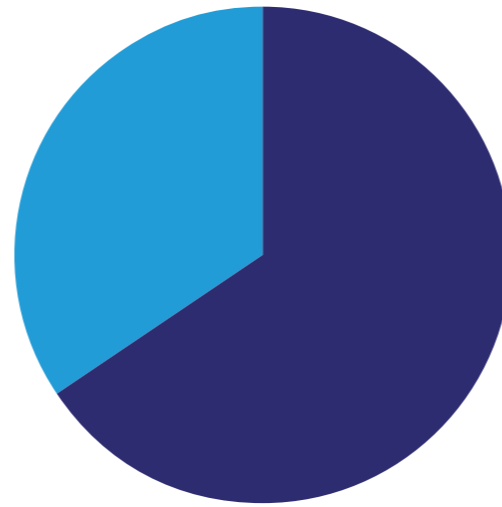
\$143,158,266



CONTRIBUTIONS*
98.83%
\$141,479,094



INTEREST AND OTHER INCOME
1.17%
\$1,679,172



FUNDRAISING

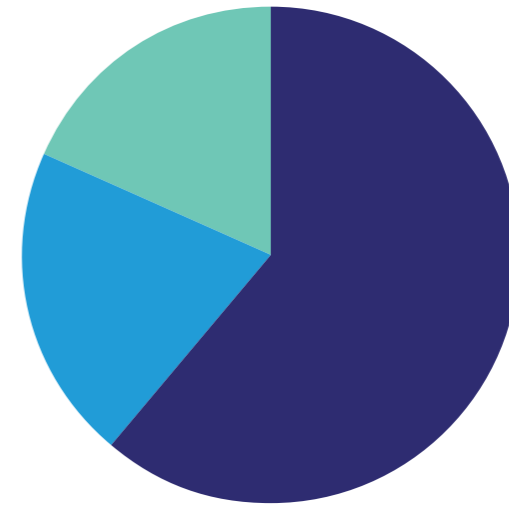
\$141,479,094



INDIVIDUAL
65.64%
\$92,872,201



CORPORATE AND FOUNDATION
34.36%
\$48,606,893



OPERATING EXPENSES

\$56,633,026



PROGRAMS
61.23%
\$34,674,826



GENERAL AND ADMINISTRATIVE
20.50%
\$11,607,198



FUNDRAISING
18.28%
\$10,351,002

AS OF DECEMBER 31, 2019

NET ASSETS: \$429,545,259

PRE-CONSTRUCTION COSTS OF

THE OBAMA PRESIDENTIAL CENTER: \$52,804,489

* Contributions include in-kind donations.



About the Foundation

The Obama Foundation is a tax-exempt 501(c)(3) nonprofit corporation established in 2014 to support President and Mrs. Obama's lifelong goals to empower leaders, build stronger communities, and create lasting change at the local, national, and global levels. The Foundation oversees planning for the future Obama Presidential Center, as well as a range of domestic and global programs. The Foundation calls the South Side of Chicago home and is headquartered just a few blocks away from the future site of the Obama Presidential Center.

OUR BOARD

The Foundation is governed by a volunteer board of directors, chaired by civic leader Martin H. Nesbitt.

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OBAMA FOUNDATION BOARD CHAIR,
THE VISTRIA GROUP

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THANK YOU

This work wouldn't be possible without your support.
We are proud stewards of your gifts.

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