

Urban League of Greater Madison

Strategic Planning Process



Unfinished Business

Moving from the Periphery to the Center

Establishing Greater Madison as the Best Place for African Americans and others to live, learn, work, and earn in the Midwest.

July 2010



Introduction

In May 2010, the Urban League of Greater Madison (ULGM) initiated a comprehensive strategic planning process to define its goals and strategies for establishing the City of Madison and Dane County as the best community for African Americans and others to live in the Midwest, and to clarify the role it will play in ensuring the greater Madison community realizes this vision by the year 2020.

The Urban League's planning process will include a review of the quality, efficiency, and effectiveness of existing programs, operational structures, personnel, partnerships, and its Board of Directors. ULGM will also collect input and feedback about the League and its programs and services from key stakeholders and supporters, residents of greater Madison, and the organization's staff and Board of Directors. In addition, the planning process will include brainstorming and visioning sessions with state, local, and community leaders, young professionals, and high school and college-aged young men and women. The data, ideas, and information derived from this work will be used to define the organization's priorities, goals, objectives, and strategies for the next three to five years. More importantly, the ULGM's planning process will help ensure the organization charts a clear path for the future – a path that is commonly understood by ULGM, its key stakeholders, and the greater Madison community.

The Urban League's planning process will go far beyond what other organizations generally do to engage stakeholders in the assessment and development of their mission and strategies. Instead of relying solely on traditional planning approaches – one-on-one meetings, focus groups, team planning workshops, and expert consultants – ULGM will engage residents in every neighborhood in Madison, its local Villages (i.e., Shorewood and Maple Bluff), and seven neighboring communities surrounding Madison (Middleton, Monona, Oregon, Stoughton, Sun Prairie, Verona, and Waunakee) to determine the future focus, scope and scale of its advocacy, programs, and services.

The Urban League's six-month planning process began on May 1, 2010 and is projected to conclude November 1, 2010. ULGM plans to announce its new plans and strategic direction at a free community event in Madison on November 19, 2010.

Unfinished Business: A Brief History of the Urban League of Greater Madison

"The Executive Committee of the Friends of the Urban League feels deeply that Madison will soon exercise a strong pull of disadvantaged people.... Negroes in great numbers are already on the periphery in Madison and the discontented will move on quickly. We believe that Madison ought to be ready to receive and absorb them as useful and constructive citizens of the community. This is what the Urban League is all about."

This quote appeared in a 40 year historical about the Urban League of Greater Madison, "Forming the Struggle, 1963-78, written by Shauna Rone, Milele Chikasa Anana, and Jonathan Gramling (2008). It recounts a 1960s study commissioned by a group of local citizens who sought to identify growth trends and needs of African Americans in Dane County. The authors also share that the University of Wisconsin was so impressed with the study that they decided to "emulate it, focusing on Black unemployment and the dropout rate in local high schools."

In 1977, the Urban League provided economic development, employment, education, housing and social welfare programs. Their programs included a tutorial program to help students receive their GEDs, an ex-offenders reintegration program, and an apprenticeship program for skilled labor jobs. In 1978, James Graham, then executive director of the ULGM, was cited in interview in the Capital Times as saying, "a stated goal of the Urban League [is] to bring a sense of community to the city. I think the Urban League, working in conjunction with other organizations, can bring that feeling back to Madison."



Guiding Questions: What is going on?

The challenge with the past statements and programs reflected in the previous section is that Madison is still wrestling with the same issues more than 40 years later, and the Urban League of Greater Madison continues to focus on the same issues and offer the same programs with the same hope of moving African Americans and others out of poverty and into the middle class. How could it be that after four decades, greater Madison and the Urban League continue to focus on the same issues, utilizing similar services to solve such long-term challenges? Is it because these initiatives have been wildly successful and therefore, have been maintained; or is it because African Americans continue to find it hard to succeed and achieve real breakthrough with regard to quality education, employment and housing in Dane County?

Is it because local leaders and organizations have sought to stimulate success among African Americans without effectively challenging or changing the culture, beliefs, or status quo in local schools, businesses, governmental institutions, and policy making bodies that have long served as obstacles to Black progress? Or, is it because the growth in needs among African Americans have far outpaced Madison and Dane County's ability to accept, serve, and fully engage and integrate them into the culture of community and the opportunities that are offered here?

Why has the region fallen short of the Urban League's goal for economic and social progress and prosperity among African Americans? Why do low high school graduation rates persist among African American youth? Why are African Americans still grossly under-represented among technical and managerial occupations and business ownership in Dane County? Why does Dane County lead the nation in incarceration rates among African American men and the gap in graduation rates between black and white children? Why does the academic achievement of Black children in Madison equal that of some of the lowest performing cities in the nation, particularly at the middle and high school level; and why aren't our schools more vigorously pursuing and implementing strategies that have demonstrated success with rectifying these gaps?

Why do so many African Americans who reside in Madison express strong desires to leave? Why do so many of our African American native sons and daughters who have left the region for college or work elsewhere refuse to return to Dane County – a region that is widely heralded by national media as one of the best communities in America to live, work, enjoy life, and raise a family? Who is to blame...or more importantly, what is to blame?

The Urban League of Greater Madison is not interested in assigning blame. However, it is committed to identifying and eliminating the social, structural, political, and economic barriers that have gotten in the way of African American progress, prosperity, and success, as well as other populations the organization serves. To this end, ULGM will partner with individuals, businesses, and organizations who share the organization's zealous desire to change a status quo that continues to undermine the health and long-term health of the region – and African American men, women, and children in particular.

To be continued.