



THE STEVE FUND

Dear Colleague:

The Steve Fund is pleased to share the report of our Crisis Response Task Force: “Adapting and Innovating to Promote Mental Health and Emotional Well-Being of Young People of Color.” The Steve Fund’s mission is to promote mental health and emotional well-being of young people of color, particularly as they transition from adolescence to adulthood. We serve as a trusted resource for knowledge, strategy, and support to inform decisions, investments, and actions by colleges and universities, non-profit organizations, employers, and philanthropy.

In response to current events, we formed a multicultural Task Force comprised of students, mental health experts, and cross-sectoral leaders to collaborate on recommendations that will protect the mental health of young people of color in these challenging times and beyond. The Task Force directed its attention to the higher education experience and transition to the workforce as these inflection points have profound implications for mental health.

As fall begins, we take stock of the varied and unpredictable scenarios unfolding in education settings and workplaces, with promising responses emerging in some and ineffectual ones in others. Notwithstanding the challenges, many young people from the nation’s hardest hit communities continue to demonstrate incredible resilience, courage, and optimism. They comprise a fast-growing demographic whose mental health and preparedness for leadership roles have tremendous consequences for the nation. They hold the future in their hands, and with their talents and capabilities, young people of color are up to the charge. Yet because of their identity, the social determinants of health, and the disparate impact of the pandemic and the nation’s racial reckoning, they face serious threats to their mental health and emotional well-being. We should not underestimate those threats, nor fail in our collective duty to apply innovative and timely solutions to address them.

The Steve Fund’s immediate aim is to assist in developing and implementing these solutions. We bring to the task the knowledge and experience of mental health experts whose backgrounds and cultural understanding are highly aligned with the needs of populations most deeply impacted by the current crises. We provide programs, services, and technical assistance to colleges and universities, non-profits, and companies as they pursue their missions and strive for excellence in serving, educating, and employing young people of color. The Task Force’s recommendations will enable them to do so even more effectively during these pressing times.

For readers of this report who are new to our work, we hope that thoughtful consideration of the Task Force’s recommendations is only the beginning of your journey. The “community of action” we seek to build requires active engagement of all stakeholders—sharing responsibility, building knowledge, making investments, innovating, and learning from each other. Success will be determined in part by how effectively we tap and deploy the considerable mental health expertise required to meet the moment we face.

We are encouraged to see sizable increases in the pace and volume of emerging relevant information that must now be factored into organizational policies, programs, and investments to advance the mental health of young people of color. In the last few weeks alone, important new data has emerged:

- Commonwealth Fund documented that low income is a major determinant for mental health concerns during the pandemic
- Unidos US found that Latino students thrive when targeted institutional supports are accessible
- National Student Clearinghouse Research Center revealed that Black students’ college enrollment suffered most from online-only summer sessions in 2020

For such research to make the fullest difference in the lives of young people, it must be used to build appropriate, evidence-based mental health solutions, practices, and investments. A critical role of the Steve Fund is assisting with this transition from research to practice. While we seek to help in times of crisis, our approach is to partner in sustained ways that spur innovation in organizational and societal responses to the mental health and emotional well-being needs of young people of color. This extended, comprehensive view means that we are a strategic partner for moments of urgency, such as that which we face today, as well as for the long-haul.

We hope that this report is useful for readers, that it stimulates the kind of boundary-crossing approaches the Task Force has modeled, and that you will join our community of action!

Respectfully,
The Steve Fund
September 2020