




**REPORT 2:
BLACK MEN & BOYS**

TIME OF
RECKONING

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A community-led series of engagement and healing justice sessions focused on the criminal justice system and its collateral consequences on Black people in Minnesota.



*“It is time to acknowledge, reconcile,
and restore Black men to their/our
rightful place in society.”*

MARQUES ARMSTRONG, CONTEXTUALIZER

ABOUT THE INITIATIVE

Time of Reckoning, Healing, Listening, and Action is a series of community engagement and healing justice sessions that culminate in a Black-led town hall and policy action roundtable focusing on the criminal justice system and its collateral consequences on Black people in Minnesota.

The series strategically includes policy makers with power and influence to implement the recommendations brought forth by the community through this process.

Convened by the community and co-chaired by Dr. Brittany Lewis of Research in Action (RIA) and Dr. Joi Lewis of Joi Unlimited, this work was spurred by the murder of Mr. George Floyd at the hands of the Minneapolis Police Department (MPD). This process is an opportunity for true “radical re-imagining” of what is possible within our collective efforts to advance racial justice.

ABOUT THE INITIATIVE

Time of Reckoning consists of five critical community healing and policy action engagements that aim to illustrate to the nation what community-centered policy change can look like. Each session is structured like a congressional hearing with prepared narratives of lived experiences from Black community members (Testifiers), research and context from Black community leaders providing policy and practice solutions (Contextualizers), questions from policy makers, and a live work session with the goal of developing tangible actions and bold visions for community wellbeing.

Time of Reckoning forums amplify the lived experiences of different members of the Black family - the women, men, gender expansive people , children, elders, and caregivers.

We use healing justice as a framework for this project. In this context, healing is the process of making ourselves or becoming sound or whole again. In this work, we are healing from trauma through radical self-care. Healing justice is an evolving political framework shaped by economic and racial justice that recenters the role of healing inside of liberation that seeks to transform, intervene, and respond to generational trauma and violence in our movements, communities, and lives and to regenerate our traditions of liberatory and resiliency practices that have been lost.

**Page and Raffo, US Social Forum Detroit*

FEBRUARY 2021 FORUM

The second forum had 80 Black attendees in the Zoom viewing format and more than 2,600 views on the livestream via Facebook. The livestream was shared by 50 community members and partners, creating an accessible experience for both Black and non-Black attendees to watch, while maintaining sacred Black space in the Zoom format.

The second forum focused on the experiences of Black men, boys, and masculine identifying people. This forum was inspired by the full humanity of George Floyd as a Black man, who was once a Black boy. Often, when Floyd's name is brought up, it is about the violence he experienced at the hands of police without the context of the systems that intentionally made up his life and premature death. George Floyd is one of many Black men and boys with shared experience of state sanctioned violence. The forum centered the lives, struggles, voices, solutions, and hopes of Black men, boys, and members of the black family.

Four Testifiers and three Contextualizers shared insights to inform small group discussions; they also offered ideas for solutions, which are included below. Amir Ibn Abu-bakr As-sidiq, Jabril Copeland, Nick Muhammad, and Rashad Turner were Testifiers. Contextualizers at the forum included Larry McKenzie, an Educator, Author, Basketball Coach, Speaker, and long-time Youth advocate committed to changing lives; Marques Dwell Armstrong, President and CEO of Hope & Healing Counseling Services, LLC, CEO of Renaissance, Principal Consultant at Black Pearl, LLC and founding member of the Racial Justice Network; and Dr. Raj Sethuraju, Associate Professor, Metropolitan State University. Contextualizers shared their own experiences with these systems and offered solutions, which are included below.



“We need compassionate accountability.”

SMALL GROUP PARTICIPANT

TESTIMONY HIGHLIGHTS

Testifiers shared ways that trauma and discrimination caused harm early in life and continues to impact them. In sharing their own experiences with police, the school-to-prison pipeline, and the war on drugs, they called for providing mentorship and love to the next generation of Black youth.

“Due to my own plight and challenges engaging the system as my family fell apart, I recognized the recklessness of the policies that created the conditions that my mother and father tried to survive. The state of the Black Family was directly linked to the social, political, and economic trajectory of African descendants of slaves (ADOS)/Black families across the country. The amount of financial exploitation tied to the breakdown of ADOS/Black families is in the very DNA of America since its inception.”

– Nick Muhammad

TESTIMONY HIGHLIGHTS

“I had been painted into that corner the system pushes us in then forgets about us as we so often feel and see within various incarcerations of young Black men.”

– Amir Ibn Abu-bakr As-sidiq

“I acted [out] in rebellion, slightly hoping to get the attention of the adults around me at the time...Hoping that a person would see the signs would help me...I caught the wrong attention and felt cast aside.”

– Jabril Copeland

“[The intervention room at school] was a room with four padded walls similar to what you might see in a jail or prison. They would throw us in these rooms when we were having a ‘bad day’. I remember one day a white behavior intervention specialist twisted my arm so much that my reaction was to spit in his face...He spit back in my face and kept twisting my arm even harder. I spent several of my early elementary days in those intervention rooms not getting the education that I should have been getting.

– Rashad Turner



"You can't be what you don't see."

LARRY MCKENZIE, CONTEXTUALIZER

CALLS FOR CHANGE

The solutions raised by Testifiers, Contextualizers, and event attendees called for five areas of action:

GIVE COMMUNITY CONTROL

This includes having more individuals from the community in positions of political power as well as ensuring community control of interventions and resources intended to benefit the community.

INVEST

Solutions call for rethinking how to invest in individuals and community resources to support wealth development and access to meaningful resources. Underlying this investment is a reframing for asset-based, positive expectations about potential, not blame and criminalization.

DIVEST

Solutions call for moving resources away from policies that undermine healing and justice in the Black community.

ENSURE ACCOUNTABILITY

Ensure accountability for systems about the outcomes for individuals and the community; accountability should be at individual, organization and system levels.

GROUND IN HEALING JUSTICE

Solutions that recenter the role of healing inside of change to transform, intervene, and respond to generational trauma and violence in movements, communities, and lives (Page and Raffo, US Social Forum Detroit).

CALLS FOR CHANGE: NOW

Contextualizers called for us to reclaim the narrative of what it means to be a Black man. We must invest in programs that help Black men and boys increase their emotional and spiritual awareness and help them heal, and **provide programs for reconciliation and restoration to restore Black men to their place in society.** At the State level, **we must improve access to health insurance** (eg. affordable deductible and doing away with limits on the number of therapy sessions and unexpected bills) to allow access to appropriate, culturally informed mental health services. **Reparations and free post-secondary education were also suggestions for immediate action.**

CALLS FOR CHANGE: NOW

Contextualizers and Testifiers shared ways the criminal justice and education systems penalize Black boys and men for being Black. Participants echoed these ideas with the following calls for change now:

Revise rules and processes to strengthen accountability and transparency of public systems.

- Do not deliver legal papers or court summons to street address as a follow-up to a raid, as police raids are often grounds for eviction.
- Require police to pay if they damage people's property.
- Clarify how to file grievances with agencies.

Acknowledge the system was intentionally built this way.


- The systems we rely on are not broken— they are operating as intended.
- Understand these systems not as failures but a working representation of the white supremacist, colonial nation that was designed to extract wealth from our bodies and to kill us (modern day police departments originated from slave patrols).

Build school communities that are inclusive of, and benefit, Black people.

Host events at schools and in the community to encourage and support family involvement with children.

Stop the practice of isolating and segregating Black men and boys (in schools and in prisons); focus on healing sources of pain instead.

Commit to supporting the Page Amendment to bring quality education by allowing for systems to follow the lead of parents in a community.



“Reform the education system to make it culturally responsive and treat children of color like they are humans.”

SMALL GROUP PARTICIPANT

CALLS FOR CHANGE: LONG TERM

Contextualizers made a compelling call to stop the practice of systems materially gaining through punishment, marginalization and dehumanization...

(e.g. White community members earn money as Foster parents when Black children are removed from their families). For several systems, focusing on the root causes of harm that Black men and boys face will mean real improvements rather than focusing on behavior. Systems need major change to allow Black men and boys to thrive. The education system, including special education, should be recreated to draw out the talents of Black youth, especially using kinesthetic learning methods. The system needs more Black teachers, so boys see teachers who look like them, understand them, and hold them accountable for being the best they can be. The criminal justice system overhaul should end the current practice of assuming guilt for Black men and boys.

CALLS FOR CHANGE: LONG TERM

Participants provided guidance on how policymakers should work with the community. They should be willing to take their budget and invest it in the community's solutions. When looking for change, come sit with the community, come alongside and support the community.

Finally, certain investments will help change the current reality for Black men and boys, such as rites of passage and mentoring programs or pipeline programs to help Black men get into counselling and teaching positions.

Use reparations as a legal framework to target resources to people experiencing disparities

- Direct payments (lump sum and/or installments) or tax credits.
- The ADOS Reparative Justice Fund, which calls for the allocation of a fund proportionate to the historical disparities facing the ADOS/Black Community.

CALLS FOR CHANGE: *LONG TERM*

Provide and invest in long-term investments for healing from root causes and ensuring opportunity across systems, including

- Resources for brothers and sisters who have been incarcerated.
- Non-traditional leadership, education, and service opportunities.
- Housing-first programs, which house people before offering other services that are then more easily coordinated.
- Equitable access to bank loans, housing, etc., that have not traditionally been equitable.
- Programs that help Black men and boys increase their emotional and spiritual awareness, maintain mental health, and address historical and intergenerational trauma, like healthy masculinity workshops; mentorship programs where both black men and boys support and encourage one another; pathways to receive culturally appropriate mental healthcare; and improved access to needed healing by expanding state health insurance to include healers like massage therapists, reiki workers, pastors, and ministers.
- Develop a community space and environment that nurtures dignity and pride in identity and culture

CALLS FOR CHANGE: LONG TERM


Reform systems including child protection and K-12 education to focus on recognizing humanity, providing resources, and accountability rather than on punishment.

- Focus on treating root causes rather than compliance-oriented systems that criminalize behaviors.
- Provide the resources needed to pay for Black teachers to get certified and \ guarantee them job placement.
- Address family concerns with a holistic and public health lens to gain healing and restoration by providing culturally relevant mental health and family coaching to support healthy family dissolution outside of the courts; passing the African American Family Preservation Act; and investing in services for families raising young children, like coaching, and reforming child support not to penalize one parent but to support both.
- Change legislation that penalizes and tears apart Black families.
- Invest in education practices and settings that work for Black youth like building a pipeline of Black teachers; providing culturally grounded education focused on children's humanity; and centering higher education spaces around the community they are in that hold up examples of Black scholars, and hold trauma-informed and full human spaces
- Create private school systems we have full agency to lead and control.

CALLS FOR CHANGE: *LONG TERM*

Shift from criminalizing Black people for their trauma to creating more accountability for police and the general public.

- Pay people who are trained in anti-policing interventions/training as much as police are getting paid with benefits (beyond \$80,000/year).
- Extend the statute of limitation for discrimination and harassment from seven to ten years.
- Create/strengthen accountability measures for racial microaggressions and discrimination Black consumers experience (e.g., being followed in a store).
- Require police to live in the community.
- Shrink the footprint of policing and bring in the appropriate professionals, elders and other experts to address issues in the community.
- Reverse the trend toward militarizing the police, encouraging a focus on compassion rather than a warrior mentality.



“We don’t need a savior. ... We need you to come alongside us and support us in what it is that we are attempting to do.”

MARQUES ARMSTRONG, CONTEXTUALIZER

CALLS FOR CHANGE: *RADICAL REIMAGINING*

Contextualizers called for transformative changes and reimagined versions of the above systems. They called for people to come together to unite, invest their collective strengths and abilities, and draw on the spirit of Sankofa and the village methods to make change.

In addition, they called for an education revolution: allowing for the autonomy of young men and boys, eliminating standardized testing, and ending the indoctrination of the “American Way” in the minds of our children. Contextualizers called for doing away with the concept of policing, founded in white supremacy, as we know it today. We also need to denounce and do away with white terrorism. Finally, Contextualizers reimagined the restoration of the Black family, calling for programs for Black men and boys grounded in love and discipline that help boys envision a future of any path they want to take in life.

CALLS FOR CHANGE: *RADICAL REIMAGINING*

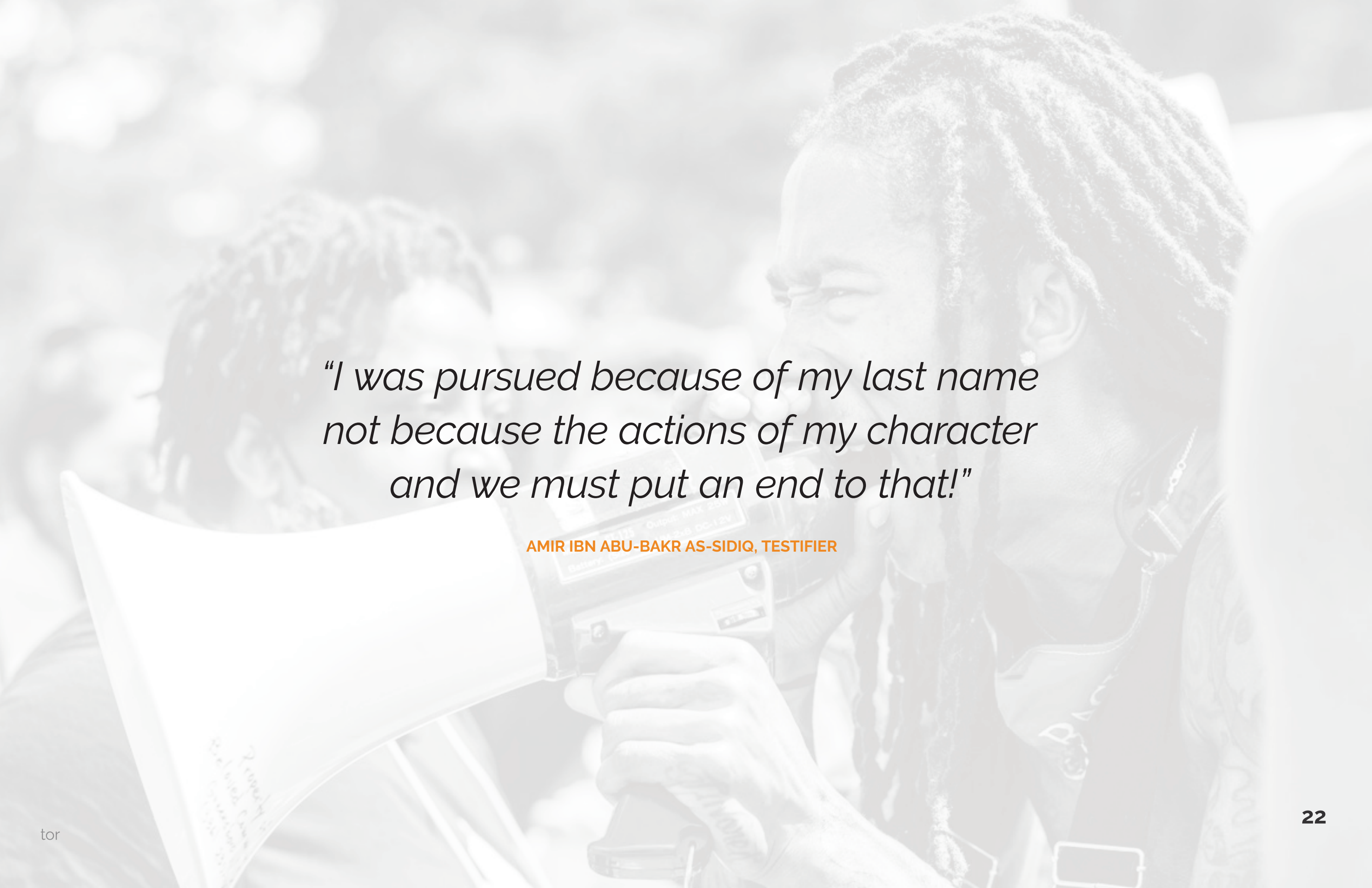
In small groups, participants added these radical visions for change:

Unite as a people to find solutions from within.

- Pour into and rebuild organizations and institutions already present in our community
- Trust ourselves and ask each other, “What do you want your legacy to be?”
- Share wealth.
- Engage elders in holistic community-building.
- Create sovereign systems that are for us, by us and respect the humanity of Black people, such as housing.
- Reclaim the narrative of what it means to be a Black man and a Black family.

Reimagine a community safety system that ensures Black people's safety and leads with love.

- Abolish the police and create different systems of safety that resource our education, provide more access to jobs and job training in high yield industries, and close the Black and white homeownership gap.
- Pass policies that promote positive and favorable laws that guarantee housing, health care, wellness, and access to opportunities to repair historical and intergenerational harms without relying on policing and penal institutions.
- Create a culture in the prosecutor's office that is focused on restoring community
- Have a Minnesota Department of Human Rights office that is proactive about recognizing people's humanity and excellence, rather than focused on compliance.

A woman with long dreadlocks is shown in profile, speaking into a handheld microphone. She is wearing a dark jacket with a strap across her shoulder. The background is blurred, showing other people. The image has a light, semi-transparent overlay.

*"I was pursued because of my last name
not because the actions of my character
and we must put an end to that!"*

AMIR IBN ABU-BAKR AS-SIDIQ, TESTIFIER

OUR TEAM

(FROM LEFT TO RIGHT)

CO-CHAIRS

Dr. Joi Lewis
Dr. Brittany Lewis

CORE TEAM

Lulete Mola
Marcus Owens
Hassan As-Sidiq
Pastor Brian Herron
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OUR PARTNERS

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