

## [Inside the mayor's new poverty plan](#)

Mayor Michael Bloomberg will throw \$127 million and a dozen city agencies at the seemingly intractable problem of young minority men disconnected from the city economy.

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By [Daniel Massey](#)

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In announcing a sweeping, \$127.5 million initiative Thursday to improve the lives of young black and Hispanic men, Mayor Michael Bloomberg zeroed in on the imperative of bringing them into the mainstream of the city economy.

The billionaire mayor's foundation will kick in \$30 million and hedge fund manager George Soros will match that amount. The remaining \$67.5 million will be paid by the city.

The Young Men's Initiative will include efforts to improve education, job placement, health and criminal justice outcomes for about 315,000 black and Hispanic men between the ages of 16 and 24. More than a dozen city agencies will be involved.

"There is no cure-all, and we're not going to be able to reach every single person no matter what we do," the mayor said in a speech Thursday morning. "But we have to give it our best shot. Because until we do, we will continue losing billions of dollars in economic activity, billions of dollars in taxpayer money and—worst of all—we will continue losing an untold number of lives to violence and poverty."

Youth development experts applauded the mayor's initiative and were hopeful that it would lead the city's business community to follow suit.

"I'd strongly encourage the business community to take up the mayor's call, to be open to providing employment opportunities for young African-American and Hispanic men, including those who have criminal records," said Colvin Grannum, president of the Bedford-Stuyvesant Restoration Corp., a Brooklyn-based community development organization.

Mr. Grannum said his group has worked with Applebee's restaurants, which has been aggressive in providing opportunities to young people with criminal records.

"Our business community has to take its cue from the mayor and from Soros and recognize there's a whole host of ways they can invest in this population," said David Banks, the president of the Eagle Academy Foundation who co-chaired the mayor's investigation into the barriers facing black and Hispanic youth. "Young people need internships, they need exposure, they need jobs. They need to be able to understand the reality of what it means to work downtown."

JoAnne Page, president of the Fortune Society, which runs reentry from prison programs, said businesses could benefit from hiring the formerly incarcerated.

“Really good people are hard to find,” she said. “If you do something that artificially limits your pool so that you screen out motivated, talented, smart people with strong desire to do well, you shoot yourself in the foot.”

She said people who come out of prison often have an “extra edge” because they've been given a second chance. “It buys a level of loyalty and passion about the work,” she said.

“The mayor elevating this issue to a priority will be a catalyst for trying to get employers to figure out what to do to be helpful,” said Kathryn Wylde, president of the Partnership for New York City.

One key component will be an overhaul of the Department of Probation, which supervises nearly 30,000 New Yorkers, most of whom are black and Latino males, according to the mayor's office. The department will open five satellite offices in neighborhoods with high populations of at-risk youth, with the aim of connecting men on probation to work and educational opportunities and reducing recidivism.

Of the funds, \$18 million will go to “transformative mentoring and literacy services,” while \$24 million will go to a school program called the Expanded Success Initiative. The latter aims to close the so-called achievement gap between racial and ethnic groups in graduation rates. The city will also announce new measures to hold schools accountable for the performance of black and Hispanic boys.

Another \$25 million will expand Jobs-Plus, which works with residents of public housing projects. The mayor will issue an executive order barring city agencies from creating unnecessary barriers to city jobs for applicants from criminal convictions.

Advocates said it was too soon to tell whether the \$127.5 million represents a new investment or whether it was a repackaging of existing and recently-announced grants received by the city. Nevertheless, the mayor's focus on the issue is being widely hailed throughout the youth development world.

“For the mayor to come out and point out things and try to come up with remedies and put his own resources and his own personal stature on the line on this is a major move forward,” said David Jones, president of the Community Service Society of New York, which has for years focused its work on young people who fall outside the city economy.

Eliza Ronalds-Hannon and the Associated Press contributed to this report.

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