

## Greater Rochester Black Agenda Group presents...



### **“AN OPPORTUNITY AGENDA FOR THE DIGITAL DIVIDE IN ROCHESTER, NEW YORK”**



April 20, 2020

#### **Problem Statement**

As we know, the *Digital Divide* has been an issue facing the Black community since the advent of the computer. The current pandemic has made this divide apparent. The Rochester community has systematically failed to effectively respond to the needs of the Black community, which has exacerbated the negative effects of the Digital Divide in the face of the current COVID-19 pandemic. The implications are disproportionately experienced across multiple contexts including healthcare, education, social life, government, and the workforce—afflicting the entire lifespan. Key challenges include technology access for education, work, and play; human social connection; and access to vital government, health, and social services. National and state policies such as “New York on Pause” and social distancing promote feelings of loneliness, anxiety, and depression. If necessary progressive actions are not taken in haste, we (members of the Black Agenda Group) fear dire consequences such as self-harm, interpersonal conflict, and even deaths will increase.

#### **Opportunity Agenda Overview**

As dedicated community members of the *Greater Rochester Black Agenda Group*, we perceive our “new normal” presents unique opportunities to address the common and culturally-specific needs of the Black community. In examining the horizon beyond the horizon, we contend progressive steps are essential to moving our community forward. Community well-being, wealth building, and shared prosperity are the ultimate measures of success. We offer the following items to advance this *Opportunity Agenda*:

- **Technology Access** – The central opportunity for addressing the Digital Divide is the prospect of making technology accessible to the most vulnerable populations within our community. Essential activities include increasing access to low-cost high-speed broadband internet through the activation and completion of a robust information technology infrastructure. In addition, we want to ensure equitable access to the tools to fully participate and provide the requisite skill-building activities and resources to assure sustainability.

- Health & Wellness – Health and mental health is a foundational action area. Key opportunities include working to ensure our community members are fully able to participate in the emergent shift to telemedicine, telehealth, tele-peer support, and indigenous healing modalities (e.g., Emotional Emancipation Circles<sup>SM</sup>). These can be achieved through collaboration with physicians, mental health counselors, therapists, and community members affiliated with the *Healers Place*, in addition to other cultural community resources.
- Jobs & Entrepreneurship – Viable career pathways and entrepreneurial opportunities exist in the technologies, professional services, and the health sectors, as well as sustainable/green and arts-based business and career fields. These present critical areas for education and training, job placement/recruitment services, and cultivating new ventures from community members impacted by furloughs and layoffs, resulting from the COVID-19 pandemic.
- Learning and Development – Organizational and community education is critical to human capacity-building opportunities within our community. Opportunity areas include general and financial literacy, cradle-to-career educational pathways, business skills, Undoing Racism<sup>®</sup> Community Organizing Workshops, civic engagement for Black students, families, educators, community-based organizations, and businesses. Leveraging cohort and apprenticeship models facilitate deep levels of relationship-building and accountability, which is consistent with Black cultural community values.
- Cultural Innovation – Combining recent technological advancements and social resources (e.g., coding academies, digital communications tools, virtual community networks, and online investment tools) with traditional cultural community values, rituals, and customs are a proven strategy to ensure relevance and adoption, and bolster community engagement. Cultural programs (e.g., rites of passage, and Black holidays), culturally-relevant pedagogy, and cooperative economic development methodologies exemplify phenomena that meet community members where they are and advance equity and inclusion.