

IT'S TIME FOR A BREAKTHROUGH

WITH ITS "JOBS REBUILD AMERICA" PLAN IN PLACE, THE NATIONAL URBAN LEAGUE IS SET TO PUT PEOPLE BACK TO WORK, AND HELP JUMPSTART THE ECONOMY



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The power of mobility

Creating job opportunities in America's underserved urban communities has long been the key mission of the National Urban League.

And for 54 years, AT&T has been proud to partner with the NUL in that mission. Today, mobile broadband is playing an ever-increasing role in creating job opportunities — and connecting people to those opportunities.

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It has been four years since the economy tripped headfirst into the Great Recession, and the National Urban League (NUL), a 100-year-old civil rights organization with nearly 100 affiliate groups across the country, has seen firsthand the impact of the downturn that's decimated African-American communities worse than most.

"In terms of the human impact, the recession is overwhelming at the grassroots level," says Marc H. Morial, president and CEO of the NUL and a former two-term mayor of New Orleans. "We see an increased number of people seeking jobs, and greater numbers of families seeking safety-net-oriented services, including housing counseling, and rent and utility assistance."

With economic failure still on the doorsteps of NUL affiliates (the organization's first responders who assisted more than 2.1 million people in 2010), earlier this year the NUL weighed in with a comprehensive plan for economic recovery, emphasizing jobs as the solution to the nation's malaise.

JOHN LUND/GETTY IMAGES

The “Jobs Rebuild America” plan embodies not only the NUL’s legacy of fighting for the economic empowerment of underserved communities, as well as Dr. Martin Luther King’s economic-justice goals, it also builds on the organization’s track record of providing practical solutions to crucial issues facing black Americans. Today those issues are unemployment and the widening of the black-white earnings gap. According to the U.S. Department of Labor Bureau of Labor Statistics, joblessness among black Americans was at 16.2 percent in May 2011, compared to 8 percent for whites, while the NUL’s own research shows that the black-white earnings gap, which narrowed between 1979 and 1999, is widening again.

“Jobs Rebuild America” offers a 12-point blueprint for quality job creation. It advocates policies such as the expansion of small-business lending, the establishment of “Green Empowerment Zones” to incentivize environmental industries in low-income areas, tax reforms, job-creation funding and the reauthorization of the Workforce Investment Act. But the key element of the NUL plan is improving educational opportunities for the unemployed, young people, mature workers and entrepreneurs. And even as the NUL calls on government to take action, it is already leading by example, running programs that emphasize training for the opportunities it believes black Americans will be able to take advantage of in a future recovery.

“Education and training are very important for both a short-term and a long-term economic strategy,” Morial explains. “Joblessness always disproportionately affects

those with lower educational attainment, so a focus on education is critical to alleviating joblessness.”

Like the NUL, “Bank of America has a long history of supporting underserved, low- and moderate-income communities, and we believe these communities are vital to promote economic health,” says Ken Wade, senior community affairs executive for Bank of America. “NUL has laid out a thoughtful and powerful set of approaches to ending the unemployment crisis, but its fundamental precept—that access to meaningful, adequately paid work is crucial to the healthy function of a market-based democracy—is key.

“As a major financial institution in the national conversation on jobs, we take our role very seriously,” continues Wade. “Unemployment kills prosperity, and that is bad for everyone. One of the many ways our mission aligns with NUL’s is supporting diverse small businesses. In addition to direct lending to small businesses, and investments into Community Development Financial Institutions that provide micro-lending in underserved communities, small businesses have told us that what they need most is more business. As a result, we announced a commitment to increase our spending with small, medium-sized and diverse businesses, pledging to purchase \$10 billion in products and services from those companies over five years.”

THE POWER OF ENTREPRENEURS

Birmingham, Ala. native Ellen Burts-Cooper is typical of the entrepreneurs that the NUL believes—with a little help and know-

how—can be turned into powerhouses in the rehabilitation of communities because of their ability to offer living-wage jobs.

Burts-Cooper arrived in Cleveland in 2007 and started her business training and consultancy company, Improve Consulting and Training Group, part-time from a home office. In spring 2009, she called on the local NUL Entrepreneurial Center for advice with a project, and later enlisted its help to devise a business strategy and find more clients. In May, she was able to leave her job to concentrate on her business full-time, and now has two full-time employees and 20 contractors to service 26 clients in nine states.

“My business was going OK,” she says, “but the Entrepreneurial Center helped me grow and reach a broader customer base. They helped me get to the next level.”

The NUL’s Entrepreneurial Centers operate in nine cities, and last year provided 10,911 hours of counseling and 11,242 hours of training services to 5,938 entrepreneurs. They also helped these business owners get \$20.19 million in new contracts, bonding and financing.

Citing U.S. Small Business Administration data, the NUL sees huge benefits in helping small businesses deliver on their potential since they’ve created 65 percent of net new jobs over the past 17 years, and pay 44 percent of the total U.S. private payroll.

“Entrepreneurship has been a silver lining in the cloud of the Great Recession,” says Morial. “In the last decade, black-owned businesses have grown at triple the national rate. African-Americans have a long history of responding to high unemployment and discrimination by creating new businesses.

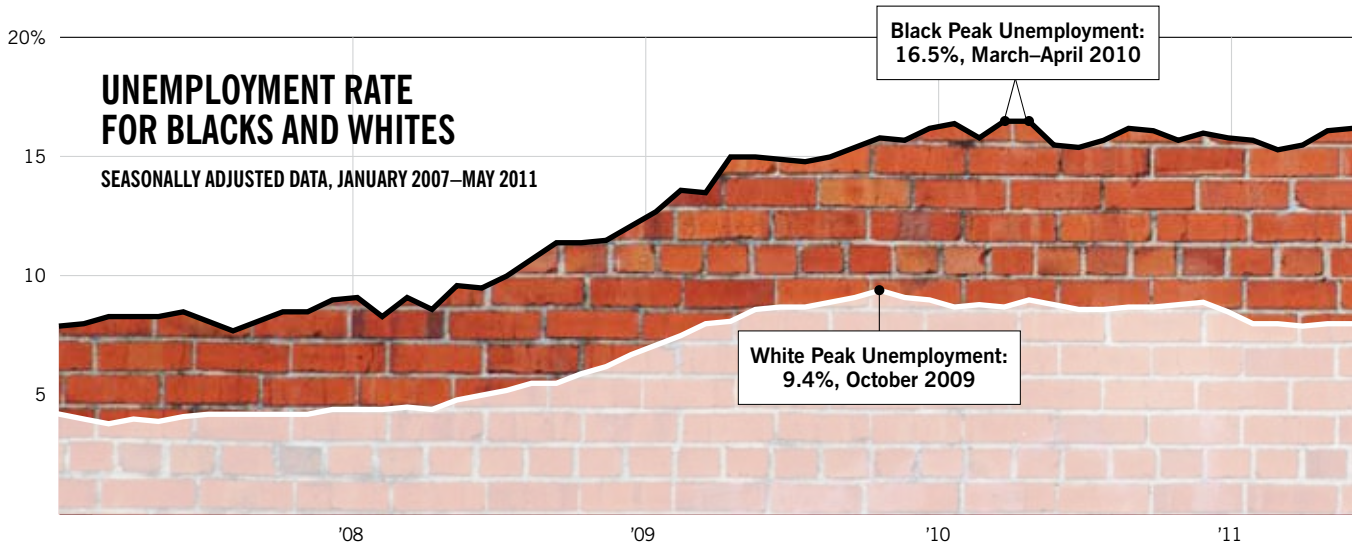


Diverse perspectives help set opportunity in motion.



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Diversity is integrated into our core business practices and operations. Not only is it the right thing to do, but actively supporting an inclusive environment creates a workforce that reflects where we do business. As a result, we are a better company, a better partner in the community and a better place to work.



SOURCE: BUREAU OF LABOR STATISTICS, CURRENT POPULATION SURVEY

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Ellen Burts-Cooper called on her local NUL Entrepreneurial Center in Cleveland to help grow her consulting company.



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Small businesses are one of the greatest engines for job creation.”

But while there is huge potential in small businesses like Burts-Cooper’s consulting firm, the NUL points out that black entrepreneurs have unique needs, including management training and greater access to capital, and their potential can’t be tapped without help.

“The centers provide coaching, counseling and classes to help people learn how to be more effective entrepreneurs to lead to greater growth,” says Morial. “From developing marketing plans to understanding how to compete more effectively, to learning how to connect with diversity-supplier programs, Entrepreneurship Center participants are growing and strengthening their businesses.”

THE ROLE OF TECHNOLOGY

The NUL believes information and communication technology will provide one of the most extensive job and entrepreneurship opportunities for black and urban communities, despite the fact that the adoption of technology is low at present in these communities, and their participation in this industry and service sector is weak.

“The main factor is the affordability of home computers and home broadband services,” says Morial. “Computers are not

free; you have to pay for Internet service.”

In its plan, the NUL stresses the need to lift skill levels in science, technology, engineering and math, and to expand access to broadband for low-income communities. “Quite simply, technology training is the key to the jobs of the future,” Morial says. “More jobs and more opportunities require technical aptitude, and it’s vital that young people are prepared to compete in the 21st century.”

“Project Ready: Digital Connectors” is one of the NUL’s ongoing programs that Morial believes shows the way forward. Sponsored by Comcast and One Economy (currently operated in partnership with the Broadband Opportunity Coalition), the Project Ready: Digital Connectors program immerses students aged 14 to 21 in technology training, and its success has the NUL busy expanding it across the country. “There are 16 Digital Connectors Affiliates,” explains Morial. “Eight affiliates launched programs in fall 2010 and are serving 107 students. The other eight will begin this summer. Through the 16 programs, a minimum of 320 and maximum of 480 students will be served through June 30, 2012.”

Sandeep Chawla runs the Project Ready: Digital Connectors program in Rochester, N.Y., his hometown. He’s trained 15 students, who just graduated from the six-hours-a-week pilot program in June.

“In Rochester we work with minority kids and underserved youth who don’t always have access to resources where they can learn tech skills,” says Chawla, 27, a program coordinator at the Urban League of Rochester’s After School Academy. “The success of the program is that kids walk away with something tangible—certificates in IT and financial literacy—that they can use on their résumé going into college. And beyond that, it builds the confidence and technical skills to get them into the new tech workforce and compete for jobs.”

The NUL’s initiatives in technology training are of particular interest to AT&T, which sees an alignment of goals between the organizations. “The biggest area of cooperation between us and the NUL is around technology, and, in particular,

THE NUL BELIEVES INFORMATION AND COMMUNICATION TECHNOLOGY WILL PROVIDE THE MOST EXTENSIVE OPPORTUNITIES.



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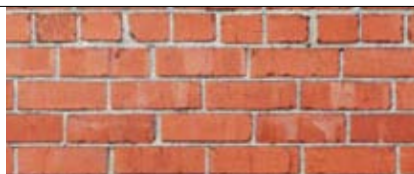
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THE ROLE THAT AFRICAN-AMERICANS AGE 50 AND OLDER PLAY RECEIVES LITTLE ATTENTION. THE PAST FOUR YEARS HAVE BEEN DEVASTATING FOR THEM.

driving access to technology and communication,” says Xavier Williams, senior vice president, Public Sector and Healthcare, AT&T Services Inc. “At AT&T we support the concept of a dynamic and private jobs initiative, and we want to help drive technology support in the broadband area where the growth is, and where the NUL has taken the initiative. Increased participation in technology means not only people having jobs with tech industries, but also encouraging the creation of companies to participate, as well—be it firms that make and distribute DSL boxes, or legal and accounting firms. Mobile broadband and its long-term evolution will create the need for a highly trained workforce and, through mentor and protégé relationships, and matchmaking between us and suppliers, we see NUL’s participation as being essential to us at AT&T as we evolve our business, especially in broadband.”

THE CASE FOR MATURE WORKERS

Although the status of young and future African-American workers is regularly studied, the role that African-Americans age 50 and older play receives little attention. The past four years have been particularly devastating for them.

“The level of unemployment among

older workers is higher than ever,” Morial says. “People over 50 are the new face of unemployment, and they face unique challenges. They have the skills, energy and experience, and they want to work.”

A recent report by the National Urban League and AARP found that, despite some progress over the past three decades, older African-American men are less likely to participate in the labor force than their Hispanic and white counterparts. Even so, the report concluded with the optimistic claim that older African-Americans could be well positioned to take advantage of the job opportunities likely to emerge in a rejuvenated economy.

To help mature workers fill shortages in what it expects to be growth industries, the NUL launched the Mature Worker Program (MWP), which provides job-readiness education, including computer literacy, résumé and interview preparation, as well as the opportunity to retrain. Over the past

six years, participants have been placed in permanent jobs at an average rate of \$11.37 per hour. MWP currently serves 1,800 participants annually in Boston, Newark, Dayton, Pittsburgh, Detroit and Long Island, N.Y.

“More than 7,000 older workers have received training and services, and many have found permanent employment, through Mature Workers since 1979,” Morial says. “The success is truly inspirational. We’re seeing employers recognize the value of experience, and their businesses are stronger as a result.”

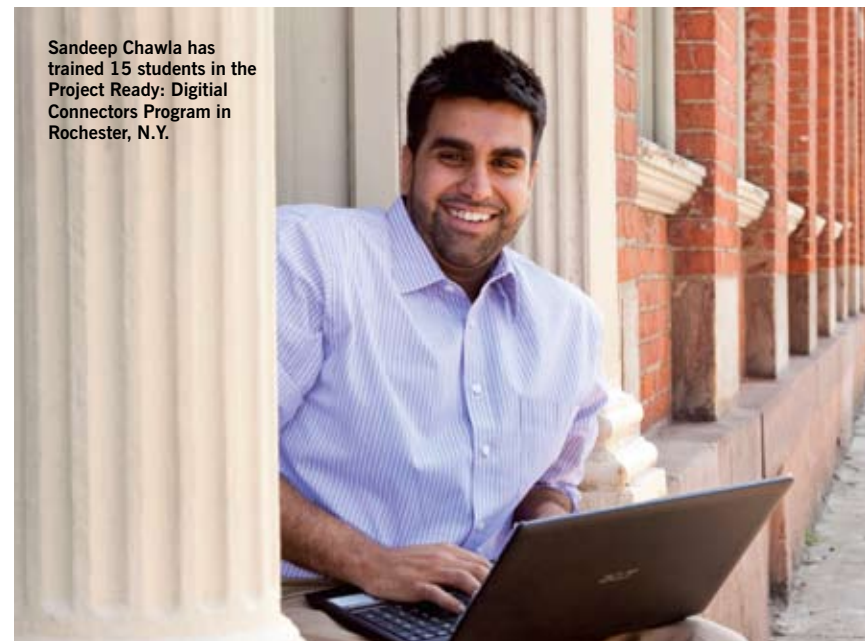
A TRIED-AND-TRUE PROGRAM

While the latest NUL plan emphasizes putting African-Americans back to work as the fix for the economy, the organization can point to one program it’s been running for 40 years as a validation of its plans and methods. Created in 1969, the Black Executive Exchange Program (BEEP) has impacted the lives of more than 900,000 students.

“BEEP is active at 84 four-year historically black colleges and universities, and other predominately black institutions, and prepares students to become the sophisticated and knowledgeable employees that corporate America and its global competitors are seeking,” Morial says. “It exposes students to working professionals in their fields of interest and familiarizes them with the demands and expectations of those industries.”

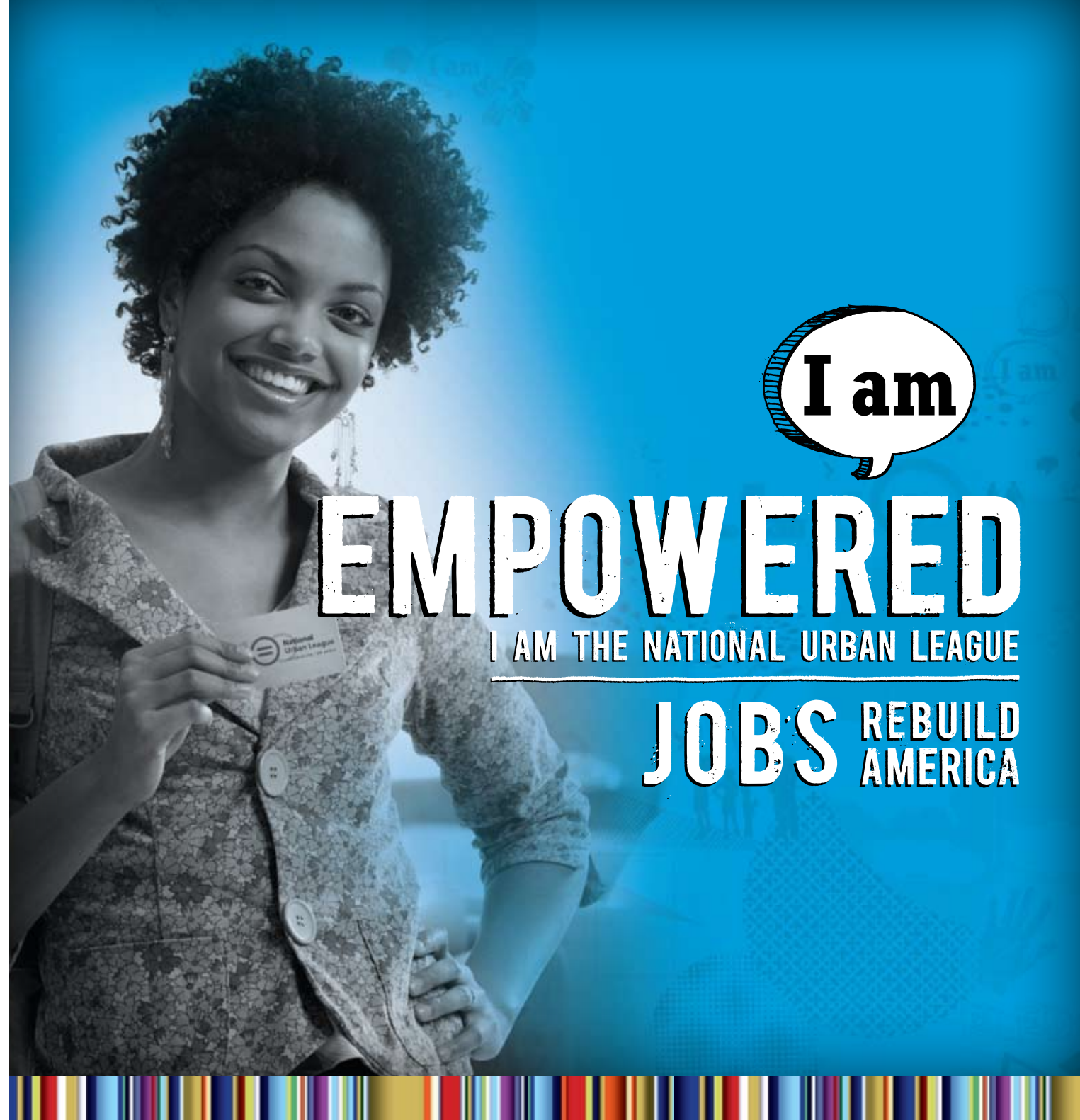
More than 2,000 such professionals have participated in BEEP to date, and the program has gained the cooperation of more than 1,000 corporations, government agencies and professional organizations. So successful is the program that NUL boasts, “Scratch the surface of any major corporation or organization and you’ll find a BEEPER.”

Amber C. Thomas, 24, in the final year of a BA in business administration program at St. Augustine’s College in Raleigh, N.C., credits BEEP with helping her set her sights on an MBA and a law degree, and a future career in international corporate consulting. BEEP’s assistance has been very practical. For instance, she says, the program has already helped her get good internships offers, such as the one she’s taking this summer with Oracle in San Francisco. “I received internship offers from a number of



Sandeep Chawla has trained 15 students in the Project Ready: Digital Connectors Program in Rochester, N.Y.

MICHAEL OKONIEWSKI/BLOOMBERG



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Amber C. Thomas, a student from North Carolina, is spending the summer as an intern at Oracle in San Francisco as a result of the BEEP program.

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companies and a government agency, and I would not have gotten them without the NUL and BEEP," she says.

Thomas, who is a student member of BEEP's executive advisory council, says the program provides an opportunity for professionals and corporations to give back to their communities and help African-American college students, especially those from lower-income families, achieve their goals.

"I've learned from BEEP that you have to have a vision that includes your community," says Thomas, who grew up in Tampa Bay, Fla. "While I've been given all these great opportunities through the program, it's also brought home the importance of me going back and providing the same opportunities to other young people."

THE NUL IS CONFIDENT THAT ITS PLAN TO PUT URBAN COMMUNITIES BACK TO WORK WILL RESONATE WITH CORPORATE AMERICA.



MORE REMAINS TO BE DONE

The NUL maintains that economic recovery will be hollow if it doesn't include jobs for all Americans; and that, without a national will to invest in economic opportunity for all, any statistical return to prosperity will fall short of a genuine recovery for the Americans who've spent the last four years looking at unemployment checks that don't stretch far enough, and foreclosure notices peppering the morning mail.

"The government must do more," says Morial. "In the political mainstream, the impact of the recession in human terms has not been fully grasped. During the National Urban League's New England Jobs Tour, I met with a group of '99ers,' people whose unemployment is about to expire. Their situation is desperate and they are having trouble finding hope."

Business, too, will play a part, and the NUL is confident that its plan to put urban communities back to work will resonate with corporations like GEICO, which has a relationship with the NUL that dates back 50 years. "GEICO and the NUL are both concerned with the economic health and social well-being of impoverished communities throughout America. We also recognize that positive community change can only be achieved through economic empowerment, education and employment

opportunities," says Rynthia Rost, vice president of public affairs at GEICO.

"GEICO applauds the fact that the NUL raises awareness about a bevy of economic and social issues," says Rost. "We support their national programs and initiatives. It's our company's goal to serve as a great corporate partner. Some examples of our latest projects with the Urban League include sponsorship of the Urban League of Hampton Roads' Speak Now Act Now Symposium; support for the Boston Urban League as the host of the 2011 National Urban League Conference [July 27-30]; and continued support for various community outreach programs with the Greater Washington Urban League."

Short term, the NUL is focused on building support for the Urban Jobs Act of 2010, which would authorize federal grants for an urban jobs program, remedial education and job training for high-school dropouts.

Action can't stop there, however. What's needed now more than anything else, Morial says, is a national consensus and the wide acknowledgement that businesses, community organizations and government must act together with the goal of turning the economic tide by putting people back to work.

"We need to focus on creating jobs and lifting people up," Morial says. "Government and the private sector must do more. This is a national crisis. We cannot rest as a nation." ●



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