Kresge’s Director of Program Operations and Information Management, Marcus McGrew, recognizes firsthand the importance of creating opportunity for boys and young men of color. After he began tutoring a young man, he recalls, “I was stunned to learn that his experiences, by and large, were contained to his neighborhood.”

Encounters like these are what drive McGrew to lead Kresge’s Boys and Men of Color (BMOC) Work Group. It was established in 2013 after Kresge joined what has grown to be 41 other foundations participating today as members of The Executives’ Alliance to Expand Opportunity for Boys and Men of Color.

The Alliance is a coalition of national, regional and community philanthropic partners committed to leveraging the sector’s role in improving the life trajectory of boys and young men of color. Its mission ultimately is to promote asset-based narratives that recognize and lift up boys and young men of color as architects of their own liberation.

“Society often perceives that boys and men of color cause their own problems, without regard to the dysfunctional systems that have continued to fail these men for decades and centuries,” McGrew says.

Members from nearly every Kresge department participate in Kresge’s BMOC working group, which meets to explore issues and make funding decisions. Funded partners include:

- The National CARES Mentoring Movement, a unique mentoring program that addresses the root causes of trauma with mentees.
- The annual Create Justice convening, supported in part by Kresge’s Arts & Culture Program. This partnership between Carnegie Hall and the Network for Incarcerated Youth explores ways in which the arts can prevent recidivism.
- Campaign for Black Male Achievement, Bing Youth Institute and D.L.I.V.E (Detroit Life is Valuable Everyday), a violence intervention program. Kresge supported all three in 2017.

To date, the work group has awarded operating support and other grants totaling $400,000 to organizations supporting boys and men of color. General operating support helps to advance sustainable operations for nonprofits — particularly grassroots, community-based organizations. It provides them with the discretion to use financial support in ways they need most.

As a man of color, McGrew knows that he is no different from the boys and men the work group is aiming to help.

“The ultimate future outcome for this work is self-sufficiency and for these men to grow into the best versions of themselves,” he says. “With that comes a lot of work to dismantle systems that perpetuate injustice, inequity and inequality. That is the real work.”

Aligning with Kresge’s mission to expand opportunity for people with low incomes in America’s cities, the work group’s focus is to help build capacity of groups long committed to the work.

“The desire is to invest in these types of organizations and to help them build their capacity,” he explains, “so they can be around for the long haul to keep serving this population we care so deeply about.”