UNTAPPED POTENTIAL
Fulfilling the Promise of Big Brothers Big Sisters and the Bigs and Littles They Represent
Big Brothers Big Sisters is undergoing a nationwide strategic planning process to establish its new vision and direction for the years ahead. Their primary goals are to:

- Provide at-risk children with the supports—including mentoring—they need to succeed
- Leverage the untapped potential of current and former mentors and website visitors who do not become mentors
- Improve their fundraising efforts
- Develop a platform to engage their constituents and advocate on behalf of children in the program and beyond, both nationally and in communities across America

Ultimately, the organization wants to be known for its outcomes, not just mentoring.
Project Methodology

- 4 focus groups in Albuquerque and Detroit
- Nation wide survey of 597 Bigs and 405 Littles, age 12 and older
- National Literature and Landscape Review
- Final report and recommendations
OUR FINDINGS

LIFTING UP THE VOICES OF BIGS AND LITTLES
Central Message

- Findings support Big Brothers Big Sisters’ core mission of mentoring and provide foundation for building stronger advocacy and engagement strategy to bolster mentoring and other efforts to support youth.
Three key research findings:

- Littles are **confident** they can meet their future goals and say their **Bigs help a lot**
- The biggest problems Littles face are **bad influences, inadequate schooling, drugs, and unsafe neighborhoods**
- Littles believe that **working hard**, **getting a good education**, and having good **role models** are keys to success
94 percent of Littles have a lot or some confidence they can achieve their future goals and understand what it takes to do so

- 97 percent said working hard in school
- 95 percent said going to school and getting a good education
- 94 percent said graduating from college
- 81 percent said working hard outside of school
- 34 percent said being lucky
Littles also recognize the power of a loving, caring adult to help them reach their goals

- **93 percent** said it was very important to have adults care and look out for them
- **86 percent** said it was very important to have role models to whom they could look up
Bigs Are Important in Littles’ Lives

- The survey also found that Littles felt they were getting this kind of support from their Bigs:
  - **85 percent** said they always enjoy spending time with their Bigs
  - **80 percent** said they feel their Bigs help them **a lot**

**How much does your Big help you?**

- **Helps a lot**: 80%
- **Helps some**: 13%
- **Helps a little**: 4%
- **Doesn’t help at all**: 2%
Barriers to Success: Negative Peer and Neighborhood Influences

- 58 percent of Littles said there are too many bad influences that lead kids in the wrong direction;
- 53 percent said not having enough for kids to do after school;
- 51 percent identified too many people using drugs, 49 percent said not being safe
Barriers to Success: Inadequate Education

- **23 percent** of Littles said biggest challenge children face is attending schools that don’t teach them what they need to know.

- Littles said **individual attention** and **extra help (25 percent)** and **hands-on learning (24 percent)** would make school more interesting -- mirrors key findings from dropouts.
If Littles were in charge of giving kids the **best** chance to succeed, they would **first**:

- Make sure all kids have a good school to go to (28 percent)
- Make sure all kids have a role model or mentor (24 percent)

**Little Brothers/Sisters**: If you were in charge of giving kids like you the best chance to succeed in life, what is the **FIRST** thing you would do?
Lifting Up the Voices of Bigs

- The “Big” experience **profoundly changes perspectives** on challenges youth face
- Bigs’ **top concerns** for Littles are about **education** and **negative influences**
- Bigs agree with Littles that **improved schools** and **more role models** would do the **most** to help
When asked what their worries were for their Little, Bigs said they worried about their Little:

- Not getting the education needed to support themselves as adults (56 percent);
- Giving in to peer pressure (51 percent);
- Repeating a bad example set by parents (40 percent) or older siblings (27 percent);
- Not completing their high school education (34 percent); and
- Having an unsafe home environment or being subject to abuse or neglect at home (22 percent)
Bigs’ Worries for Their Littles

- Bigs also identified **challenges** they fear will stand in the way of their Little’s goals. They identified:
  - Lack of motivation or discipline (**46 percent**);
  - Adults who are negative examples (**44 percent**); and
  - Peer pressure (**43 percent**)

- Bigs also worry about Littles’ tough life circumstances, including lack of self-esteem, poor quality of schools, and unsafe neighborhoods.
Bigs’ Say They Help Their Littles Some

- 1 out of 5 Bigs (19 percent) said they feel like they have been able to help their little a lot

How much do you feel you have been able to help your Little when it comes to being able to achieve his or her goals?

- 56% have been able to help a lot
- 22% have been able to help some
- 19% have been able to help a little
- 3% have not been able to help
What Bigs Think Will Help Most

- Bigs say making sure kids have access to more positive role models and improved schools would greatly improve their Little’s chances for success:
  - More positive role models like coaches and teachers (73 percent);
  - More access to positive role models like Bigs (69 percent); and
  - Making improvements in schools, like more after-school/weekend activities (51 percent) more relevant classes (48 percent); and overall improvement in the quality of schools (54 percent)
Reflecting on the Big Experience: Opportunity for Mobilization

- 84 percent of Bigs said that their experience changed how they look at challenges at-risk youth face a great deal or a fair amount.
- 82 percent said their experience as a Big makes them want to do more to help their Littles and children like them.

How much has your experience as a Big changed the way you look at the challenges faced by kids like your Little?
Bigs Support a BBBS Advocacy Effort

- **95 percent** of Bigs support a BBBS advocacy effort for all kids.

- **82 percent** of Bigs assert that advocating for all children is a continuation of BBBS’s mission.

- **78 percent** want to get more people involved in directly helping children, while only **22 percent** want to change public policy that affects children.

- **73 percent** said they would be either very interested or fairly interested in an engagement strategy.

- **82 percent** believe that Bigs working together could make a very significant or significant impact.
The Content of Engagement

- For Bigs, grassroots work locally is a higher priority than changing public policy nationally:
  - **78 percent** of Bigs said that *encouraging other individuals* to be more involved in directly helping children was more important than changing public policy.
  - The primary goals identified were to *encourage business, religious, and other community leaders to get more involved* (62 percent) and encourage other people like themselves to get involved (51 percent).
RECOMMENDATIONS
In order to accomplish its goals Big Brothers Big Sisters should:

- In the Nation
  
  ✓ **Create new momentum and funding support for mentoring** by setting a numerical goal to expand best practices mentoring to more at-risk children.
  
  ✓ **Leverage national relationships** to enhance and implement effective solutions to problems that affect children, including high school and college graduation, reduction of drug and alcohol abuse, and positive role modeling in safe neighborhoods.
  
  ✓ **Call on federal, state, and local leaders** to place mentoring high on the public agenda and advocate for its support.
  
  ✓ **Issue an annual national report card** to measure the extent of the children’s population that needs special help and identify heartening or troubling trends in youth development.
In order to accomplish its goals Big Brothers Big Sisters should:

- **In the Nation**
  - Create an online network for alumni Bigs and Littles to keep pairs engaged and to amplify their voices for the public
  - Commission future research that will enhance best practices mentoring and solidify the field as results-driven and evidence-based
  -Lead the charge in emphasizing the importance of graduating high school and obtaining a post-secondary credential
In order to accomplish these goals Big Brothers Big Sisters should:

- In States

  ✓ **Provide local agencies with information** on how to form strong state associations to enhance their fundraising and advocacy efforts

  ✓ **Collaborate with other reputable groups** at the state level that focus on youth development and advocate for policies beneficial to all children, such as CHIP expansion, raising the compulsory school age, or school reform
In order to accomplish these goals Big Brothers Big Sisters should:

- **In Agencies and Communities**
  - Use the voices of **Bigs and Littles** to create a champions for children network that would enable them to work side-by-side with other local leaders to improve the lives of children at-risk of not reaching their goals.
  - Create **innovation councils for youth** composed of local agencies and other local best-practices organizations that specialize in each of the critical youth development support categories.
  - Advocate for mentoring as part of a **comprehensive strategy** to change the conditions that give rise to barriers in the lives of at-risk youth.
  - Train **Bigs on how they can become adult advocates** for their Littles at school.
Final Thought

- “It is easier to build strong children than to repair broken men.”
  - Frederick Douglass