

Omaha MBK Leaders Preview Obama Presidential Center, Share Progress Toward Six National Milestones

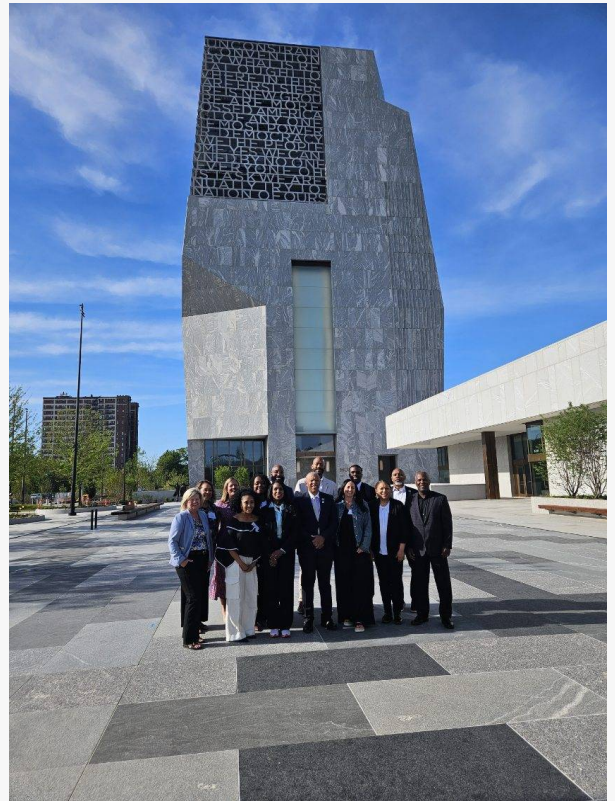
CHICAGO, IL, UNITED STATES, June 16, 2026 /EINPresswire.com/ -- [Empowerment Network](#) and Omaha leaders joined My Brother's Keeper Alliance communities from across the country May 28 in Chicago, where they shared the city's progress as a nationally recognized MBK Model Community, highlighted work to expand impact across all six MBK milestones and received an early preview of the Obama Presidential Center before its public opening later this month.

The Omaha delegation participated in a My Brother's Keeper systems leaders convening hosted in connection with the Obama Foundation. The gathering brought together the four model communities and national partners to compare progress, learn from one another and discuss strategies tied to the six MBK milestones.

Community leaders from across the country met to focus on education, careers, violence prevention, leadership and strategies to improve outcomes in local communities. The event opened with breakfast and a self-care session centered on reflection and sustainable leadership.

Speakers included Adren O. Wilson, Ph.D., vice president of Youth Opportunity Programs and executive director of My Brother's Keeper Alliance; Michael Strautmanis, chief corporate affairs officer of the Obama Foundation; and John B. King, chancellor of the State University of New York and a member of the University of the State of New York Board of Regents.

MBK Omaha was selected as an MBK Model Community for achieving population-level impact in Milestone 6, which focuses on keeping youth safe from violent crime and providing second



On May 28, Empowerment Network joined My Brother's Keeper communities from across the country to preview the Obama Presidential Center.

chances. Through intentional collaboration among multiple stakeholder agencies, Omaha reduced homicides by more than 50% from 2011 to 2024. Omaha has a documented 70% reduction in gun violence since the start of Omaha 360. The African-American Empowerment Network leads the Model Communities initiative for MBK Omaha.

Building on that progress, MBK Omaha is now working to achieve population-level impact across all six MBK milestones through coordinated strategies in pre-K, K-12 education, postsecondary education, workforce development, public safety, family support and community empowerment.



During the visit to the Presidential Center, Empowerment Network led an informative panel discussion highlighting the organization's initiatives, partnerships and broader community-based strategies to improve outcomes for young people and families.

Omaha's presentation, facilitated by Empowerment Network CEO Willie Barney, used a panel conversation format rather than a traditional slide presentation. The panel highlighted Omaha

360, Youth 360, Step Up Omaha, Skill Up Omaha, the Empowerment Network's Village Readers Program, Omaha Public Schools partnerships and broader community-based strategies to improve outcomes for young people and families.

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*Willie Barney, CEO,
Empowerment Network*

The format allowed local leaders to speak directly about the relationships, partnerships and day-to-day work driving Omaha's MBK efforts.

“Impactful is an understatement,” said Jonathan Chapman, vice president of Community Collaboratives, following the visit. “After walking the halls and touring the museum, I’m

still in awe and still reflecting on the honor of being a part of only the second group to experience the Obama Presidential Center through our model community work with the My Brother's Keeper Alliance and the impact we're making here in Omaha.”

Participants said Omaha's work stood out because of its whole-family approach and its emphasis on connecting youth development, education, public safety, workforce development and community empowerment.

One example is Step Up Omaha, which is creating paid training, employment and career exposure opportunities for young people. In 2025, 580 young people gained paid training and job experience through the program. Step Up Omaha now offers year-round jobs and coaching designed to help youth stay connected to career pathways.

"Attending the convening with the other national cities and hearing their feedback was extremely encouraging," said Willie Barney, CEO of Empowerment Network. "Being among the first groups to tour the Obama Presidential Center was an incredible opportunity and a transformational experience. President Obama is challenging all of us to continue doing our part to make this a better city and nation."

The momentum has drawn additional support from the city of Omaha, which invested \$600,000 to help expand the program. MBK Omaha and its partners are also working to align Step Up Omaha with Omaha Public Schools College and Career Pathways, with the potential to reach 10,000 high school students. Through Nebraska's On-the-Job Training program, partners are also working to help employers hire more youth by reducing wage costs.

The Omaha delegation included Mayor John Ewing; Douglas County Commissioner Chris Rodgers; Susan Christopherson of Omaha Public Schools; Willie Barney; Jonathan Chapman; Vicki Quaites-Ferris; Deputy Police Chief Sherie Thomas; Jennifer Green of the Lakin Foundation; Emily Nguyen of the Weitz Foundation; Dr. Viv Ewing; Tim Christian, an AAEN board member; Carmelita Christian; Yolanda Barney of the Revive Center; and Calvin Jones of Lion's Gate Security.

Quaites-Ferris said the convening created valuable connections with leaders from cities including Yonkers, New York; Newark, New Jersey; and Tulsa, Oklahoma. She said other communities were energized by the MBK milestones and eager to continue building toward measurable progress.

The center's grand opening ceremony is scheduled for June 18, with the public able to begin visiting the campus and museum June 19. The center's public opening weekend is scheduled for June 19-21 and will include community-centered programming, according to the Obama Foundation.

Quaites-Ferris described the center as "unbelievable" and said Omaha leaders discussed the possibility of organizing a future bus trip to Chicago so more community members, partners and young people could experience it.

Chapman said the museum experience was both nostalgic and hopeful, reminding him of a time when the country felt "filled with hope." He said that feeling connects directly to Omaha's ongoing work to create opportunities for young people and families.

The My Brother's Keeper Alliance, an initiative of the Obama Foundation, works with

communities nationwide to address opportunity gaps facing boys and young men of color and to support local systems that help young people reach key life milestones.

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