



**Black & Female Leadership Initiative  
January 2013 – December 2018**

**LEADERSHIP IN THE 21<sup>st</sup> CENTURY**

The leadership development field abounds with theories, models, techniques and tools designed to nurture and prepare individuals to lead. Many of these approaches to preparing today’s leaders are based upon the social, economic, cultural and community standards of earlier times. The reality is that twenty-first century leaders face new challenges and opportunities as our communities are more complex and more interconnected.<sup>1</sup>

Social justice activists and diverse communities are re-imagining and redefining what leadership means and which faces are at the forefront. Late in the 20th century, scholarship emerged describing new leadership as a collective, shared process that evolves with participants and prioritizes relationship-building.<sup>2</sup>

Collective leadership occurs when people come together and mobilize resources in ways that improve their communities. It is an intrinsically inclusive approach to leadership because it requires individuals to cross boundaries of all types –such as race, gender, class, age, religion and culture – as they commit to cooperative learning, joint action, shared responsibility and mutual accountability. Competencies include the capacity to develop oneself and to cross many boundaries: those between individuals and groups, those among organizations and those fostered by issues that divide. It also involves challenging assumptions; expanding perspectives from an emphasis on the “I” to accentuating both “I” and “We;” and bringing people together to address conflicts.<sup>3</sup>

An even more recent innovation in leadership theory is to posit race analysis as central to effective leadership that can exercise power in social justice movement building.<sup>4</sup> Even so, leadership within the social justice movement or more broadly, continues to be defined within a framework that assumes white males are the default leaders and a “leader and follower” dichotomy is the natural order. Even today, when our President of the United States is an

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<sup>1</sup> *The Collective Leadership Framework: A Workbook for Cultivating and Sustaining Community Change*, a publication of the W.K. Kellogg Foundation (2007),

[www.iel.org/pubs/collective\\_leadership\\_framework\\_workbook.pdf](http://www.iel.org/pubs/collective_leadership_framework_workbook.pdf)

<sup>2</sup> *A Framework for 21st Century Leadership*, <http://www.ioe.org/ioe/1995december/a1.php>

*A Review of Leadership Theory and Competency Frameworks*,

<http://www2.fcsh.unl.pt/docentes/luisrodrigues/textos/Lideran%C3%A7a.pdf>

*The Holistic Leader: A Developmental Systemic Approach to Leadership*,

[http://www.julieorlovconsulting.com/docs/holistic\\_leader\\_article.pdf](http://www.julieorlovconsulting.com/docs/holistic_leader_article.pdf)

<sup>3</sup> W.K. Kellogg Foundation, loc.cit.

<sup>4</sup> *Weaving Color Lines: Race, Ethnicity, and the Work of Leadership in Social Change Organizations*,

<http://lea.sagepub.com/content/5/2/131.full.pdf>

African American man, the most recent study of diversity in the charitable sector<sup>5</sup> reveals that white men are overwhelmingly in the top leadership positions.

Additionally, there is minimal scholarship available on the role of Black women's leadership in modern social justice movement theory and practice.<sup>6</sup> Our *Black & Female Leadership Initiative* was launched in January 2013 in honor of the 30<sup>th</sup> anniversary of *Black & Female: What is the Reality?* to definitively add to the field of leadership theory, the academic lexicon of leadership studies and the demonstrated evolution of social justice movement building practice.

## **BLACK & FEMALE LEADERSHIP INITIATIVE**

*\* By initiative, Be Present, Inc. refers to our long-standing programs and support structures that reflect our commitment to building collaborative leadership and authentic partnerships for social justice. This initiative work toward outcomes that move Be Present, Inc.'s vision and goals forward. We invest in people and innovative strategic leadership that leads to societal transformation in the near- and long-term.*

Be Present, Inc.'s roots emerge from nationally recognized trainer and activist Lillie P. Allen's *Black & Female: What is the Reality?*<sup>®</sup> workshop at the *First National Conference on Black Women's Health Issues* held at Spelman College in 1983 in Atlanta, GA. This conference birthed the *National Black Women's Health Project* (now the *Black Women's Health Imperative*). In 1988, a group of Black women trained by Ms. Allen as self-help group facilitators invited other women of color and white women activists to participate in *Sisters & Allies*<sup>®</sup>. This leadership initiative formed the foundation for Be Present which incorporated as a nonprofit in 1992. Diverse men and boys have been participating in all aspects of the organization since 2008.

Be Present, Inc.'s work grows out of 40+ years of experience in developing sustainable leadership for social justice. We support individuals to be more effective leaders in creating well being within themselves as well as in their families, organizations and communities. This mission is accomplished through:

- Teaching the Be Present Empowerment Model<sup>®</sup> to strengthen individuals' self knowledge and capacity to consciously listen and act;
- Providing training and systems of support to sustain collective leadership knowledge and skills;
- Sustaining a diverse national network of locally organized activists to enhance capacity for movement building; and
- Creating alliances with other nonprofits dedicated to creating a more just world.

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<sup>5</sup> *A Man's World*, <http://philanthropy.com/article/A-Mans-World/57099/>

<sup>6</sup> *Theorizing African American Women's Leadership Experiences: Socio-Cultural Theoretical Alternatives*, [http://advancingwomen.com/awl/awl\\_wordpress/theorizing-african-american-women%E2%80%99s-leadership-experiences-socio-cultural-theoretical-alternatives/](http://advancingwomen.com/awl/awl_wordpress/theorizing-african-american-women%E2%80%99s-leadership-experiences-socio-cultural-theoretical-alternatives/)

*A Re-articulation of Black Female Community Leadership: Processes, Networks and a Culture of Resistance*, <http://www.rcgd.isr.umich.edu/prba/perspectives/spring1997/ballen.pdf>



The Be Present Empowerment Model® has more than 40 years of practice that illuminates currently recognized best leadership practices, including fully incorporated race, gender, class and power analyses; as well as a fully integrated collective leadership model pioneered by Black women. This Model teaches how groups can come to consensus, make decisions and move social justice agendas *outside* of the distress derived from individuals’ current and historical experiences of oppression based on race, gender, class, age, sexual orientation, language, ethnicity and religion, among others. It has a proven track record of successfully transforming individuals, organizations, institutions and communities.

The Black & Female Leadership Initiative addresses an ostensible lack of the voices and visibility of Black women’s leadership in the literature, historical record and dialogue on social justice movement-building. It also highlights the process as well as the achievements of using a collective leadership approach in creating a diverse national network of activists successfully moving social justice agendas in the United States. As a result, the Initiative will position the Be Present Empowerment Model within the lexicon of academic research and published writings about collective leadership and specifically the leadership of Black women in partnering with diverse people to create sustainable change that serves everyone in our communities.

Specific **goals** are:

- Increase the visibility of the vision, perspective, experience and practice of leadership of Black women in various fields including health, midwifery, reproductive rights, criminal justice reform, education, domestic violence, family law, environmental justice, civil rights, philanthropy, immigrant and refugee rights, community organizing, public policy and performing arts, among others.
- Build collective leadership competencies of current and next generation social justice activists, students, policymakers, opinion leaders, service providers and community organizers.
- Document and disseminate best practices via publications (print and audiovisual) with a focus on collective leadership development across issue silos and fields of practice.
- Preserve historical scholarship, collective memory and national identity of Be Present, Inc.’s role in building a diverse movement for social justice by transferring organizational records to The Sofia Smith Collection, Women’s History Archives at Smith College. [An agreement is in development.]



Specific *program areas and support structures* are:

- **Black & Female: What is the Reality** gatherings and trainings to raise awareness about the Initiative and to create spaces for Black women and girls to reflect, celebrate and discuss leadership (Events held yearly in 2013-2015). Open to Black girls and women.
- Regional gatherings and trainings for network members and partner organizations to raise awareness about the Initiative and to strengthen leadership of activists. (Events held yearly). Open to all people.
- **Black & Female Leadership Institute** in Fayetteville, NC. This 18-month training series is comprised of six training sessions (February 2016; May 2016; September 2016; February 2017; June 2017(*only session open to Network members from all backgrounds*); and October 2017). Open to Black girls and women.
- **Black & Female Leadership Conference** upon conclusion of Institute in the spring of 2018 (dates to be determined). Open to all people.
- **Race, Gender, Power & Class Training Institute** in Petaluma, CA. This 18-month training series began in the winter of 2014 and culminated in a **Race, Gender, Power & Class Conference** in September 2015. Open to all people.
- **Be Present Family Camp** held yearly since 2012. Open to all people.
- **Be Present Peer Led Support Groups** held monthly in diverse communities throughout the U.S. and abroad. Open to all people.
- **Be Present Regional Organizing Core Group** meetings held monthly in Northeast, Southeast, and West. Open to all people.
- **Be Present Leadership Developers** meetings held monthly by established and emerging Regional Organizing Core Groups. Open to all people.
- **National Network Leadership Convening** in Atlanta, GA held yearly in November. Open to all people.
- **Social Justice Archives Project** that catalogues Be Present, Inc. historical papers and data; and prepares organizational records for transfer to The Sofia Smith Collection, Women’s History Archives at Smith College. Ongoing.



- ***Moving Forward in Action: Black Women and the Role of Collective Leadership in Building Diverse Movements for Social Justice*** report that shares key findings and case studies focused on lessons learned and best practices. (Fall 2018).

**BE PRESENT EMPOWERMENT MODEL®**

Be Present, Inc. believes that it is possible to bridge the chasms of racial differences and its intersection with ethnicity, gender, class, sexual orientation, religion, nationality or disability, to create a society where all people are honored with dignity and the right to thrive and express their full potential. Without examining the connection between and impact of these issues on us, our institutions, families and communities, inequitable policies will continue to slow our progress.

The Be Present Empowerment Model® provides a platform for learning, dialogue and practice to explore the impact of racism, sexism, classism and all forms of oppression upon people’s lives. It explores how history and social contexts of these issues get encoded within us and then externalized through our behaviors. It supports the analysis of how these behaviors are manifested in our relationships, communities and institutions – all of which comprise the systems we live in. It identifies challenges and strategies; and shares best practices and lessons learned on creating inclusive, socially just organizations through systemic change.

This methodology is successful in achieving long-term skills development and organizational learning. It results in individuals, organizations and coalitions being able to dismantle structures of oppression and embrace diversity and inclusion; as well as to create a solid foundation for self-exploration and deeper analysis that leads to transformation and innovation.

The three interrelated leadership realms of the Be Present Empowerment Model® are:

- Know Yourself Outside the Distress of Oppression
- Listen to Others in a Conscious and Present State
- Build Effective Relationships and Sustain True Alliances

The competencies of the Be Present Empowerment Model® include:

- Integrity and Trust
- Collaboration
- Conflict Transformation
- Consensus Building
- Diversity and Inclusion
- Effective Communication
- Facilitation
- Personal Effectiveness
- Interpersonal/Group Skills
- Conscious Listening
- Participatory Decision-making
- Resilience



**Be Present Empowerment Model and Systems of Support  
Build Collective Leadership and Sustainable Partnerships**

- (1) **Traits and Characteristics** – the foundation for learning, the inherent make-up of individuals on which further experiences can be built. Includes: confidence, courage, integrity, decisiveness, justice, initiative, maturity, commitment, creativity, self-discipline, flexibility, empathy/compassion, etc.
- (2) **Skills, Abilities and Knowledge** – developed through learning experiences, broadly defined to include school, work, participation in community affairs, etc.
- (3) **Competencies** – the result of integrative learning experiences in which knowledge, skills, abilities and behaviors interact to insure successful performance. THINK - clearly, critically and creatively, analyze, synthesize, integrate and evaluate; VALUE – make reasoned judgments and responsible commitments; ACT – purposefully, effectively and responsibly; COMMUNICATE – verbally, nonverbally, socially, interpersonally and relationally.
- (4) **Demonstrations** – the results of applying competencies. It is at this level that performance is assessed and lessons learned will be captured.