

Organizational Overview

Be Present, Inc.'s (BPI) roots emerge from Lillie P. Allen's *Black & Female: What is the Reality?*® 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. 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®. This leadership initiative formed the foundation for BPI which incorporated as a nonprofit in 1992.

BPI develops leaders from a broad range of communities and fosters participation among diverse groups, including low-income individuals, women, youth, immigrants, and communities of color. Our vision is to advance a more sustainable, just, and compassionate society by supporting people to become more effective leaders in creating healthy, thriving families, schools, organizations, workplaces, and communities.

We achieve our mission through:

- Teaching the **Be Present Empowerment Model® ("BPEM")** to strengthen individuals' self knowledge and capabilities to consciously listen and act in all aspects of their lives;
- Providing intensive **training and ongoing systems of support** to build leadership skills, knowledge, and abilities;
- Maintaining a **diverse national network** of locally organized and connected communities to sustain a more integrated and comprehensive approach to capacity building for social justice; and
- **Collaborating with other nonprofits** advancing a more resilient and equitable society.

Guiding Principles

- **Grassroots Democracy:** BPI believes that every person deserves a say in the decisions that affect their lives and thereby view participation as an end in itself. Our organizational structure develops diverse leaders at the grassroots level by insuring that all voices are actively involved in crafting our policies and programs. Peer support groups, regional organizing core groups, and trainings are open to all people; board, staff and network emerge from our constituency; and collectively engage in participatory decision-making processes across the organization.
- **Diversity, Equity and Inclusion:** BPI develops leaders from a broad range of communities and consciously works to foster participation among groups that have been "absent from the table," including communities of color, low-income people, women, and youth. We ensure that a range of perspectives, opinions, and experiences are recognized and acted upon in achieving BPI's mission.
- **Intersectionality:** BPI addresses the myriad ways that racism, sexism, classism, homophobia, transphobia, ableism, xenophobia, and all forms of oppressions interconnect and manifest within organizations, communities, and movement. These issues are named and worked through in every aspect of the organization – from trainings to network development to partnerships to governance.
- **Personal and Global Responsibility:** BPI supports individuals to act to improve their personal well-being and, at the same time, to join with people and organizations locally and more broadly to foster peace, economic justice, and the health of the planet.

Collaborative Leadership

The leadership 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.

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.

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.

An even more recent innovation in leadership theory is to posit race analysis as central to effective leadership that can exercise power in social change efforts. Even so, leadership 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.

The Importance of Building Effective Relationships

Efforts to promote change are most effective when they include a focus on the essential community building process of relationship-building. Bringing people together from diverse backgrounds to talk with one another across boundaries and to develop a sustainable sense of community requires skill in bridging differences of race, class, gender, ethnicity, age, sexual identity, language, religion, generation, and others toward a vision of the common good. It necessitates effectively changing the driving forces of power and directly addressing how all forms of oppression often disconnect people from their visions, thereby halting their ability to respond to challenges. It entails authentically engaging the people who call a community home to bring their knowledge, skills, resources, values, and commitments to the table. It warrants self knowledge and a strong sense of hope, shared responsibility, collaboration, and mutual support, without which it is more difficult for people to think in terms of organizing to strengthen themselves, their families, and communities for the uncertain world of failing economies, gaps in access and quality care, climate change, violence, and lack of a living wage and make the transition to a healthy society.

Fostering relationships of respect and trust where people have open and honest conversations requires skill in facilitating oneself as well as productive intergroup dialogues among diverse people. Sustained and meaningful intergroup contact, dialogue, and ongoing systems of mutual support are necessary to address the social inequities that render people vulnerable to failure and to develop a commonly agreed-upon set of goals that build healthy communities. Intergroup dialogues engage people in a process which encourages sustained conversation, exploration of both conflict and common ground, action to improve cross-group relations, and adaption to change and new strategies. This is BPI's core competency and our work for over 30 years.

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. It explores how history and social contexts of issues, such as racism, sexism, classism, and all forms of oppression, 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 transforming these systems and sustaining more diverse, equitable, and inclusive solutions.

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.

Three Interrelated Leadership Realms:

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

Three Interrelated Levels of Impact:

- On the **individual level**, developing competencies for inner resilience – including strengthening self-knowledge and abilities to question, engage, connect, think creatively, bring voice, take risks, reflect and take positive action.
- On the **intergroup level**, building skills for effective collaboration – including dismantling bias, addressing different sides of issues, transforming conflict, building trust, and creating lasting cross-issue and cross-sector partnerships.
- On the **community level**, strengthening the capacity for outer resilience and larger-scale change – including access to opportunities and building political will to move society in more healthy, sustainable directions.

Competencies:

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| ✓ Integrity and Trust | ✓ Facilitation |
| ✓ Collaboration | ✓ Interpersonal/Group Skills |
| ✓ Conflict Transformation | ✓ Effective Listening |
| ✓ Consensus Building | ✓ Change Management |
| ✓ Cultural Competency | ✓ Participatory Decision-making |
| ✓ Diversity and Inclusion | ✓ Resilience |
| ✓ Effective Communication | ✓ Self Awareness |
| ✓ Empowering Self and Others | ✓ Team Building |