



THE 7TH ANNUAL women OF COLOR SUMMIT

Economic Development &
Upward Mobility Coalition



KICK-OFF KEYNOTE
Krystle Ellis



VIRTUAL KEYNOTE
Kendra Brim



VIRTUAL KEYNOTE
Taina B. Martinez



HOSTED BY
Sara Taylor



Leslie Curry



Dr. Marcus Deveso



Phalyn Hayward



Talisa King



Dr. Kim Nguyen



Dr. Adeanna Tazell



Dr. Karen King



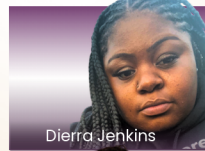
Bernarda Arias



Ruth Dalton



Tamika Franklin



Dieria Jenkins



Madeline Little



Cristina Oliveri



Catherine Thomas



Stephanie Peete



Stephanie Armstrong



Dr. Damita A. Davis



Dr. Wil Green



Dr. Shalon M. Jones



Dr. Perdita Meeks



Franchelle Parker



LaTanya K Walton-Brown



Carlette Bradley



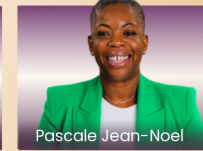
Dr. Shetara Bouie



Deja Davis



Dr. Latise Hairston



Pascale Jean-Noel



Dr. Loretha J.
McCullough



Dr. Brandiss Pearson



Jamie Warren



Ebony Burgess



Danielle Burruss



Deja Middlebrook
& La Shawn Davis



Melody
Harkness Mobebe



Nekia Kemp



Sherrell McLean



Dr. Tiera Proctor



Andrea White-Griffith

Kick-Off Event



WED - THURS
June 3-4, 2026
Niagara Falls, NY

Virtual Summit



THURSDAYS
July 16 & 23, 2026
Via Zoom



thePICD.org



Welcome to the 7th Annual Women of Color Summit & Ally Institute

We are thrilled to welcome you to the 7th Annual Women of Color Summit & Ally Institute! Over the next two days, we invite you to a powerful summit filled with high quality professional development, dynamic speakers, and meaningful connections all set within a brave and affirming space designed for learning, growth, and celebration. Attendees will leave with actionable insights, renewed confidence, and an expanded community of support.

With an inspiring lineup of expert presenters and attendees traveling from across the country, this summit is a unique opportunity to engage in courageous conversations, expand your network, and celebrate Women of Color and Allies who continue to leverage their power to address systemic

challenges throughout their career journeys. ***We are so grateful that you are here!***

This Year's Theme: B.R.I.D.G.E. represents our collective commitment to progress. Through **Building Respect**, fostering **Inclusivity**, embracing **Determination**, catalyzing **Growth**, and championing **Equity**, we create connections that elevate careers, amplify voices, and dismantle barriers. Together, we don't just cross bridges we build them, and we become them.

Event Series Goals

- Promoting Inclusivity and Intersectionality
- Empowering Through Education and Skill Development
- Advocacy for Equity and Allyship

Purpose & Overview

The Women of Color Summit provides an uplifting environment for, by, and about Women of Color that centers equity, education, and professional development. We prioritize the voices and lived experiences of women and college students who identify as Women of Color, while warmly welcoming allies and accomplices who are committed to learning, growth, and taking meaningful action.

We extend our deepest gratitude to our co-chairs, planning team, sponsors, speakers, volunteers, and the many organizations that made it possible for attendees to join us. Your collective investment continues to make this summit impactful and transformative.

This booklet includes the event schedule, workshop descriptions, and helpful resources. Full speaker bios can be found on our website at **thePICD.org**.

After a full day of inspiring sessions, we encourage you to take a stroll through Niagara Falls State Park and experience the breathtaking beauty of the Falls, a perfect moment to pause, reflect, and recharge.

If you have any questions or need assistance during the summit, please visit the registration desk or connect with any staff member or volunteer.

Thank you for being part of this incredible experience.

With gratitude and excitement,

Sara Taylor

Visionary & Deputy Executive Director at PICD

Co-Chairs:

Dr. Karen King
Carlette Bradley
Stephanie Peete

Event Manager:

Jennifer Williams

Women Color Summit & Ally Institute 2026 Planning Committee

Kick-Off Schedule at a Glance

WEDNESDAY JUNE 3RD

10:00am – 2:30pm: Ally Institute with Plenary and Workshops (includes lunch 12:30pm)

2:30pm: Summit Registration Opens

3:15pm – 5:15pm: Wellness Space and Panel

5:15pm – 6:15pm: Welcome reception with Cocktails, Heavy Hors d'oeuvres and Entertainment

6:45pm – 7:45pm: Opening, Awards and Keynote Krystle Ellis

8:00pm – 9:00pm: Author Fireside Chat

THURSDAY JUNE 4TH

7:45am – 8:45am: Hot Breakfast Buffet

8:45am – 9:45am: Opening Remarks and Plenary/ C-Suite

10:00am – 11:00am: Workshop Session 1

Dr. Damita Davis – Unapologetic! Black Women Leading in White Spaces

Franchelle Parker – I Made the Most Noise When I Sat Still: How Strategic Stillness Increases Impact

Jamie Warren – Leading in the Middle: How Women of Color Lead When You Hold Authority Without Full Power *****HR CEU Session**

11:10am – 12:10pm: Workshop Session 2

Brandiss Pearson – The Other Side of Leadership: Reclaiming Resilience, Identity, and Power

Dr. Loretha J. McCullough – Bridges We Build: Architecting Opportunity for the Next Generation
*****HR CEU Session**

Pascale Jean-Noel – Impact of Spirituality on Organizational Practice and Leadership Roles

12:15pm – 1:30pm: Lunch and Young Adult Panel

1:45pm – 2:45pm: Workshop Session 3

Andrea White Griffith – Walk in Divine Alignment: Faith for Your Flow

La Tanya K Walton-Brown – The Say Yes Way: A Practical, People-Centered Framework for Building Healthy Nonprofit Culture *****HR CEU Session**

Stephanie Armstrong – The Alchemy of Presence: Engineering Influence through Embodied Leadership and Strategic Visibility

2:45pm: Closing Charge & Call to Action



Ally Institute Explanation

In 2025 Black women and Women of Color experienced the highest rate of rate of unemployment among all women nationally, in addition, Women of Color in the United States experience the nation's persistent and pervasive gender wage gap most severely. These findings combined with the systematic dismantling of employee development programs including employee resource groups and formal and informal sponsorship and mentorship programs in the workplace prompted the WOC Summit planning committee to offer attendees and opportunity to explore how these conditions can be addressed through the lens of allyship. This was also echoed in the surveys we received after the 2025 WOC Summit. Attendees wanted to take a deeper dive into the multiple forms of allyship and how these relationships and practices impact the leadership development and advancement of Black women and Women of Color in the workplace.

As a result, The WOC Summit is launching an exciting new program, the Ally Institute, which will take place on the first day of the Summit, June 3. We will be hosting three concurrent sessions focusing on distinct areas of allyship. Each session will focus on the specific and unique challenges that establishing genuine and sustained allyship relationships and practices present.

WOMEN OF COLOR

Focus: Women of Color discuss what it means to be an Ally to fellow WOC, barriers, misconceptions, and how to create powerful alliances/coalitions. This session center empowerment, shared experiences, and building community.

Intended Outcomes: Create action plan that outlines strategies for support and advancement in the workplace.

BLACK MEN

Focus: To foster an intentional, psychologically safe dialogue between Black men and Black women that examines workplace dynamics, addresses barriers to allyship and collaboration, and promotes collective strategies for healing, partnership, and professional advancement.

Intended Outcomes: Rooted in Dr. John Henrik Clarke's call for unity, the session aims to move participants from division and silence toward deeper understanding, accountability, and shared empowerment in the workplace.

WHITE SENIOR LEADERSHIP

Focus: What are the most impactful ways to leverage power and privilege to provide programs/support to the advancement of Black women and WOC, and how to navigate retrenchment and dismantling of mentor/sponsor programs in workplace.

Intended Outcomes: This group has the power to change systems and behaviors. The participants of this session will create action plans that will focus on concrete steps to ensure Black women and Women of Color have sustained access and support to programs and professional relationships that will advance them to senior leadership roles.

Ally Institute Schedule

9:30am: Registration opens with coffee and drinks

10:00am: Opening welcome Dr. Karen King and Stephanie Peete

Review of goals and objectives and announcements regarding CEUs and breakouts

10:30am-12:30pm: Workshops

A. Women of Color

B. C-suite White Ally

C. Black Male

12:30pm: Lunch and Review of Sessions with Discussion and Strategy Planning

1:15pm-2:30pm: Closeout



Wellness Panel

As part of this year's **B.R.I.D.G.E.** theme Building, Respect, Inclusivity, Determination, Growth, and Equity this conversation is an important space to explore how we navigate, support, and prioritize mental wellness in the workplace while continuing to grow and lead.



Introducing the Keynote Speaker

"Bold" is the perfect word to encapsulate **Krystle Ellis**. As a multidimensional force with over a decade of leadership experience in both nonprofit and for-profit sectors, Ellis, known as "The Culture Broker," propels individuals across various industries to new heights. Her approach integrates strategic planning, policy refinement, fundraising, coaching, and innovative thinking.

As the owner of Ellis K Consulting and Executive Director of the Women's Foundation of Genesee Valley, Krystle is a revered figure whose expertise has guided organizations nationwide in harnessing the strengths and diversities of people. She implements system-wide changes through a positive and appreciative lens.

Krystle is also a phenomenal mainstage keynote speaker and event emcee who brings energy, insight, and authenticity to every stage she steps onto. Her ability to connect with audiences has made her a sought-after voice for organizations across the country. In addition, she has been invited to serve as a professor and guest lecturer at several prominent higher education institutions, where she shares her expertise in leadership, strategy, and culture building with the next generation of leaders.

Krystle is grounded, exudes a fun-loving spirit, and is an advocate of heart-to-heart connections. She is a tenacious business leader, advocate, wife, and mother of three who also happens to be an enthusiastic party planner. Her life's mission and ultimate reward is witnessing the success of others. Krystle meets you where you are and journeys with you to your desired destination. Her care is genuine.

Dedicated to her community, Krystle serves on several boards and has graced nationwide publications and news outlets like the Chronicle of Philanthropy and USA Today with her insights. As a philanthropist and founding member of the Rochester Institute of Technology's Sentinel Giving Society, she staunchly supports women's rights, equitable healthcare for children, and the global right to clean water. Krystle is a proponent of transparent and bold conversations that motivate people to reach for the stars. Raised under the sunny skies of South Florida and proud of her Jamaican heritage, she brings humor, a super relaxed demeanor, and an enduring commitment to transformational love and respect to every aspect of her life.



Fireside Authors Chat

Four authors will share insights from their books and discuss how their personal and professional journeys as women of color influenced the development of their work from the initial concept and writing process to publication. Attendees will gain a deeper understanding of the experiences, perspectives, and motivations that shaped each author's path to becoming a published writer.

THURSDAY

JUNE 4TH



Health and Economic Panel

Advancing health and economic opportunities for women of color requires addressing systemic barriers through targeted policy reforms, equitable access to healthcare, and intentional wealth-building strategies. This expert panel will explore key issues shaping the future of health, wealth, and leadership for women of color, including closing the racial wealth gap, the impact of artificial intelligence on economic and health outcomes, leadership pathways in STEM fields, and how employers can move beyond performative inclusion to create meaningful opportunities for the next generation of leaders.

Insight on how the Workshop Sessions align with our theme

Building – Architects of Change: Building Your Leadership Blueprint Equip participants with strategic frameworks for ascending to leadership roles while maintaining authenticity and navigating organizational dynamics as women of color.

Respect – Foundations of Resilience: Strengthening Your Professional Core Empower participants with mental wellness strategies, boundary-setting techniques, and community-building practices to sustain long-term career success.

Inclusivity – Bridges We Build: Creating Intersectional Leadership Legacies Integrate all B.R.I.D.G.E. principles to develop a holistic leadership philosophy rooted in respect, inclusivity, determination, growth, and equity. Explore how to mentor emerging leaders, influence organizational culture, and leave a lasting impact that opens doors for those who follow.

Determination – Blueprint for Belonging: Creating Inclusive Cultures That Retain Provide organizational leaders and emerging professionals with actionable strategies to design workplaces where women of color don't just survive but thrive and lead. Harness the power of determination to build mental fortitude, develop strategic pivots when facing resistance and create actionable plans that turn setbacks into steppingstones.

Growth – Engineering Influence: Amplifying Your Voice and Visibility Inspire participants to cultivate executive presence, build strategic networks, and leverage platforms to expand their sphere of influence. Develop assertiveness strategies that honor your authentic voice while navigating workplace dynamics. Learn to establish credibility, set boundaries, and cultivate professional relationships rooted in mutual respect and dignity.

Workshop Session 1



Dr. Damita A. Davis

Unapologetic! Black Women Leading in White Spaces

Workshop Description: We know little about Black women college presidents' experiences. Much of the literature regarding leadership and Black women in the academy focuses on administrators, generally, while the experience of Black women college and university presidents, particularly at four-year PWIs, is rarely studied (Howard, 2017; Turner Kelly & Winkle-Wagner, 2017). Therefore, a more nuanced examination of Black women college and university presidents was needed.

The purpose of this workshop is to share the findings from a study that examined how the leadership practice of Black women college presidents at four-year PWIs was informed by their lived experiences. Critical race grounded theory as a methodological framework was used to center the voices of nine study participants. The analysis of the findings resulted in the emergence of seven themes. These themes along with the theory Black feminist epistemology, developed by Collins (2000) led to the creation of a new leadership model, authentic black feminist leadership (ABFL). ABFL provides Black women, researchers, and the field of higher education with a more applicable framework that recognizes the influence of race and gender on as well as describes Black women's ways of leading. Unlike other leadership models, ABFL does not center whiteness or masculinity. This model highlights the different dimensions that influence how and why Black women lead.

While this presentation focuses on Black women college presidents, the framework is applicable across industries. Thus, combatting the limited view society has about Black women in leadership roles.

Conference participants will gain:

- A greater understanding of how the intersecting identities and experiences of Black women inform their leadership praxis,
- A new narrative and framework (ABFL) that Black women can use to articulate their leadership approach,
- A recruitment, evaluation, and retention tool most applicable to Black women candidates for leadership roles in the academy.



Franchelle Parker

I Made the Most Noise When I Sat Still: How Strategic Stillness Increases Impact (Subtitle: Mindfulness, Boundaries & Calendar Strategy for Women Who Carry a Lot)

Workshop Description: Women of color are often the most dependable, visible, and overextended people in the room. We lead teams, hold families together, mentor others, show up for community, and navigate systems not designed for our success all while carrying unspoken expectations to perform and produce. But what if our greatest impact doesn't come from doing more but from doing less, intentionally. This session explores the strategic power of stillness: mindful decision-making, careful work planning, the discipline of saying no, and intentional calendar management as tools for increasing long-term influence and effectiveness.

Participants will learn how scattered attention often dilutes impact and how intentional focus multiplies it. This is not a productivity session rooted in hustle culture.

It is a sustainability framework rooted in clarity, power, and preservation.

Each participant will receive a complimentary guided workbook to help implement the strategies beyond the summit.

By the end of this session, participants will:

- **Recognize the Hidden Cost of Overextension** - Identify how multitasking, overcommitment, and constant responsiveness diminish leadership effectiveness.
- **Apply Strategic Stillness Tools** - Learn practical techniques for mindful planning, structured work blocks, boundary setting, and calendar alignment.
- **Strengthen Professional Core Through Focus** - Develop a personal impact filter to evaluate opportunities, requests, and obligations.
- **Create a Sustainable Visibility Plan** - Understand how intentional planning behind the scenes leads to louder, clearer influence in professional spaces.



Jamie Warren

Leading in the Middle: How Women of Color Lead When You Hold Authority Without Full Power

Workshop Description: Across many organizations, women of color are trusted problem solvers, culture carriers, and conflict stabilizers long before they are formally recognized as leaders. They are asked to mentor peers, support teams through tension, and help leadership understand staff perspectives, yet they often operate without full decision-making authority. This workshop explores the unique “bridge leadership” role women of color frequently hold and offers practical tools for leading effectively when influence exceeds positional power.

Participants will examine how organizational dynamics, expectations of emotional labor, and informal leadership responsibilities shape their professional experiences. Through guided reflection, real world scenarios, and small group discussion, attendees will learn how to navigate difficult conversations, advocate for equity constructively, and influence leaders while preserving professional relationships.

The session provides concrete communication frameworks for addressing conflict, redirecting unproductive interactions, and elevating concerns in ways that are heard. Participants will also practice boundary setting strategies that prevent burnout while maintaining credibility and trust. Special attention is given to translating “invisible labor,” including mentoring, mediation, culture building, and team stabilization, into measurable leadership contributions that support career advancement.

Attendees will leave with a personalized leadership influence plan, practical language for high stakes in workplace conversations, and tools to support both themselves and their teams. By the end of the workshop, participants will be able to lead with clarity, maintain authenticity, and expand their professional impact while operating within complex organizational structures.

This interactive session is designed for emerging and established leaders seeking to strengthen influence, protect wellbeing, and create healthier workplaces where they, and those they support, can succeed.



Brandiss Pearson

Workshop Session 2

The Other Side of Leadership: Reclaiming Resilience, Identity, and Power

Workshop Description: Women of Color are often praised for their resilience in leadership, yet the internal cost of carrying constant pressure, responsibility, and expectation is rarely acknowledged. Over time, resilience can shift from strength into a quiet form of self-erasure. This workshop focuses on the internal experience of leadership and how sustained stress shapes identity, decision making, and well-being.

Grounded in the BRAVE™ Resilience Assessment, this session introduces a practical framework for understanding five common resilience patterns experienced by Women of Color in leadership roles: Burden Load, Rhythm Disruption, Alignment Drift, Vulnerability Suppression, and Erosion of Self. Participants will explore how these patterns show up in daily leadership practices, boundaries, and relationships at work.

Through guided reflection and facilitated conversation, participants will assess their own resilience patterns and examine where misalignment between values, roles, and expectations may be contributing to burnout or disengagement. Rather than emphasizing endurance or overperformance, the workshop centers awareness, choice, and recalibration as essential leadership skills.

This session reframes resilience as a sustainable, values-driven practice. Participants will leave with shared language, increased clarity, and practical strategies to protect their well-being while continuing to lead with impact and authenticity.

Participants will be able to:

- Identify common resilience patterns among Women of Color using the BRAVE™ framework
- Reflect on how chronic stress influences leadership identity and effectiveness
- Recognize signs of misalignment and early burnout in leadership roles
- Apply practical strategies to restore balance, alignment, and sustainability



Dr. Loretha J. McCullough

We Build: Architecting Opportunity for the Next Generation

Workshop Description: Individual success may open doors, but intentional leadership redesigns the building. This interactive session focuses on how women of color and allies can leverage influence to construct sustainable pathways from potential to power. Anchored in the B.R.I.D.G.E. framework: Building respect, fostering Inclusivity, embracing Determination, catalyzing Growth, and championing Equity, participants will examine how to shift from navigating systems to reshaping them.

Together, we will examine:

- How to influence hiring, promotion, and succession systems
- How to identify invisible cultural barriers that limit advancement
- The difference between mentoring, sponsoring, and advocating
- Strategies for building psychological safety and belonging
- Ways to prevent burnout while investing in others

Through guided reflection and collaborative discussion, participants will map the bridges they have crossed and identify institutional gaps that still need to be built. The session culminates in a personalized 90-day pathway-building action plan that is focused on one policy, practice, or access point each participant can influence within their sphere.

Attendees leave equipped not only to succeed personally, but to create durable, scalable impact that ensures leadership pathways remain open and accessible for those who follow.



Pascale Jean-Noel

Impact of Spirituality on Organizational Practice and Leadership Roles

Workshop Description: This workshop invites participants to delve into the varied interpretations of spirituality and its influence on both their service delivery and leadership responsibilities. Recognizing that spirituality holds unique meanings across individuals and generations, this training explores how these spiritual views shape our interactions and

decision-making in direct care and leadership within organizations and communities. By the end of this workshop, participants will gain insight into their own spiritual perspectives and learn to effectively negotiate and integrate their personal and professional values when working in mental health settings.

Learning Objectives:

- Participants will articulate and define what spirituality means to them personally and how it is perceived in different cultural and generational contexts.
- Participants will examine how their personal spiritual beliefs influence their professional approaches to service delivery and client interactions.
- Participants will explore the role spirituality plays in shaping their leadership styles and decision-making processes within their organizations.



MODERATED BY
Talisa King



Danielle Burruss



Dierra Jenkins



Phalyn Hayward



Madeline Little

Young Adult Panel

Passing the Torch: Preparing the Next Generation," is centered on what it truly means to lead with intention. We will explore how young women advocate for themselves, how systems either prepare or fail them, how we bridge generational differences, and how mentorship becomes real action not just conversation. This is about legacy, access, accountability, and ensuring the next generation is not left to figure it out alone.



Andrea White-Griffith

Workshop Session 3

Walk in Divine Alignment: Faith for Your Flow

Workshop Description: How do you ensure your daily life is aligned with your true purpose? Are you numb from the culture of 'influencing' and 'following'? Have you been impacted by comparison and the prison of feeling not good enough? Know that you were never made to run every race. You are made for your own lane. An extraordinary path that you can create while being encouraged by what others accomplish but belongs specifically to you! Flow is a business concept used to demonstrate the elimination of barriers and waste. It is also a reference to operating from a place of order, connection and divine purpose.

Learning Objectives:

- Share examples and stories from nature that demonstrate the power and purpose of flow
- Discuss problem solving methodologies that inhibit business and personal alignment
- Discuss sustaining personal congruency and frameworks for breakthrough



La Tanya K Walton-Brown

The Say Yes Way: A Practical, People-Centered Framework for Building Healthy Nonprofit Culture

Workshop Description: This session is grounded in real, tested culture-building practices that center on clarity, trust, communication, and equity. Through my work, I have developed a framework that helps organizations move beyond intention and into sustainable, people-first systems that reduce burnout and strengthen connection. In this interactive break-out session, participants will walk away with tangible tools, including a culture model, reflection framework, and self-assessment resources that can be immediately implemented within their organizations regardless of size or budget. As a Black woman in HR and a leader in nonprofit talent strategy, my work is rooted in building workplaces where people feel seen, supported, and equipped to do mission-driven work without being depleted by it.

Participants will leave able to:

- Strengthening trust through clear, consistent communication practices that reduce confusion and increase accountability.
- Design people-centered systems that reduce burnout and align expectations with staff capacity.
- Apply The Say Yes Way framework (Clarity, Care, Access, Equity, Consistency) to translate values into daily workplace practices.
- Implement equity in practical, actionable ways that remove barriers and support diverse lived experiences.



Stephanie Armstrong

The Alchemy of Presence: Engineering Influence through Embodied Leadership and Strategic Visibility

Workshop Description: In high-stakes professional environments, visibility is often treated as a performance to be perfected. However, for the visionary woman, true influence is not found in a script—it is found in Alignment. When there is a gap between a leader's internal truth and her external brand, friction is created. This friction manifests as self-doubt, burnout, and the "best-kept secret" syndrome.

This workshop provides the Sacred Strategy to close that gap. Stephanie Armstrong, Brand Alchemist and Strategist, guides participants through her signature 5 V's Framework: Vision, Values, Voice, Visuals, and Vibration. This session moves beyond the surface of traditional "executive presence" and dives into the Architecture of Coherence, the state where your internal frequency and your professional brand become one single, unbreakable signal.

Participants will explore how to turn their unique story into a strategic asset and their presence into a tool for systemic impact. By blending 30 years of brand architecture experience with behavioral psychology and quantum energetics, Stephanie equips leaders to move from "seeking permission" to "radiating resonance." This is an invitation to stop negotiating with your own magnitude and start inhabiting the full frequency of your leadership.

Attendees will leave with a practical blueprint for engineering an influence that doesn't just navigate workplace dynamics but actively shifts the atmosphere of the room.

Learning Objectives:

- Identify the Architecture of Friction: Analyze the specific internal and external gaps that cause visionary leaders to "dim" their light or play small in high-stakes environments.
- Apply the 5 V's Framework: Use the pillars of Vision, Values, Voice, Visuals, and Vibration to build an authentic personal brand that commands respect and establishes instant credibility.
- Master Embodied Influence: Develop a personalized blueprint for "Sacred Strategy" shifting from performative visibility to an aligned presence that attracts opportunities and accelerates career ascension.



How This Journey Began in 2018

Black ceiling exists for African-American women seeking nonprofit leadership roles

By Sara I. Taylor, September 28, 2018 | Democrat and Chronicle Rochester, NY, Guest Essayist

Over the last few years, I have participated in various state and local consortiums and work groups with other nonprofit leaders who are working to address poverty, systems change and various disparities across the region. Noticeably absent is the presence of African-American women in executive leadership roles across these organizations. Many of our local nonprofits serve large numbers of minority populations but lack leadership that reflects the individuals and families served. Diversity of voices from the top down in organizations dedicated to addressing complex social challenges is imperative.

I am very proud of our few local African-American female leaders in the nonprofit sector. However, over the last five years, I have watched a number of African-American female colleagues leave this community based on an inability to secure executive leadership roles that would allow them to continue to grow and impact the Rochester community.

One year ago, I began to implement my plans for career advancement to explore executive leadership roles in this community. Along with my years of leadership experience, community credibility, excellent recommendations and advanced degree, I hired an executive coach, obtained mentorship from experienced leaders of nonprofits and convened an executive-level

mock interview team. After getting a “we can’t make a decision right now” and no call back until I inquired after five months, the harsh realities of what other colleagues had highlighted became clear — unconscious bias and structural racism is real in this community.

A June 2017 study by Building Movement Project and The Annie. E. Casey Foundation (Race to Lead: Confronting the Nonprofit Racial Leadership Gap) noted: “To increase the number of people of color leaders, the nonprofit sector needs to address the practices and biases of those governing nonprofit organizations.”

I also believe current leaders of local nonprofits are the ones who can take a stand for racial equality. Earlier this year Cecile Richards, former President of Planned Parenthood, called on white women to do better in the fight for equality.

Although I am no longer seeking an executive leadership position in this community, I did find my calling: to speak the truth and take a bold stand against structural racism and offer coaching opportunities to African-American and other women of color seeking or currently in nonprofit leadership roles.

What board members, stakeholders, funders, and community leaders need to know is that African-American women seeking leadership roles in this community are not looking for a hand-out or to meet a quota. Our experience, education, credibility and ability to cultivate relationships with donors or collaborative partners speak for itself. We simply want equal-opportunity to lead. Rochester we must not only do better, do what's right.

Sara Taylor of Rochester is President and CEO of Positive Steps Consulting.

About 2026 Honorees

Advancing Award



For over 15 years, Arica Rouse has dedicated herself to the field of health and human services, working tirelessly with a diverse range of populations. Her extensive experience in equity work spans direct care and project management within community-based organizations, where she has quietly and effectively built strong partnerships and networks. As the Director of Community Engagement for BestSelf Behavioral Health, Arica works behind the scenes, making impactful changes without seeking the spotlight.

Arica is a certified doula, a compassionate advocate, and the owner of a successful event planning business. She has previously served on the Women of Color Planning team, always contributing her insights and leadership with humility and grace. She is the most inclusive, kind, and considerate person I know, dedicated to ensuring equity for all individuals, and has a unique gift for making everyone feel seen and valued.

Arica's work is often unsung, as she leads with integrity and a deliberate focus on advancing the well-being of women of color. Her efforts have made a profound impact on the community, though she never seeks recognition. She collaborates with others quietly and effectively, fostering change and inclusion in everything she does.

Arica Rouse was nominated for the Advancing Award because of her unwavering commitment to equity, her humble leadership, and her remarkable impact. She is a true champion for the advancement of women of color, leading not for accolades, but for the betterment of those around her.



Jalynn is a youthful voice who has committed to amplifying young women and exposing them to business, technology and entrepreneurial careers. She is a small business owner who also maintains a FT job for a local government in Rochester leading anti-violence programs and funding and over the last four years she has provided support to put for many Equity Center conferences and special events. Outside of our job, she has committed to volunteering with young women of Jewels to help them understand web design and the technology industry. After the sudden loss of her mother, she became a caregiver helping to raise her siblings and is the founder of the -Tabethis Warriors foundation with a goal to support, find a cruse and advocate for those living with Sickle Cell Disease. She is a true warrior who has lead with integrity and intentionality to mentor and support other women and guide young women.



Brianna has faithfully served on the WOC planning team representing M & T and the southern tier community for more than 3 years. She has also contributed to panels and pay equity day sessions leading her voice and expertise. She is a dedicated other community advocate for women and girls across Southern New York. She serves as a board member for the YWCA and has contributed her leadership to initiatives that advance equity and opportunity, including the Black Excellence Awards Committee and the Racial Justice and Equity Committee for the Community Foundation of South-Central New York. Since 2022, She has volunteer for many years within her community and is committed to being in spaces that uplift, connect, and empower women of color. She has also been an advocate for many immigrant and refugee women who are impacted and often frighten by this current climate. Her commitment to advancing women from all backgrounds and leads with integrity, intentionality and emulates excellence and significant contributions to empower women and girls.

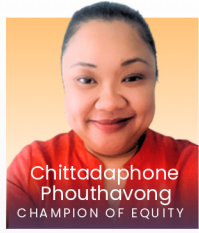


Carlette has served as a co-chair for the WOC Summit for more than 4 years to bring all of her wisdom, guidance and expertise leading our program/workshop review committee. Carlette has committed life serving women with a deliberate, intentional efforts to advance women of color mind, body and soul. She formally and informally mentors many from diverse backgrounds guiding them to understand their full potential. Her record emulates extraordinary contributions to support, promote and advance women of color on so many levels. Through her FT job, her consulting services and the masterpiece project she has reach hundreds of women across the globe imparting wisdom and so much more. We are proud to recognize her during the summit this year!

Champion of Equity Award



Under the leadership to Sharon Sandford, the Buffalo Alumnae Chapter of Delta Sigma Theta Sorority, Inc. consistently advancing equity for women of color through many initiatives in WNY. They are intentional with the partnership and collaborations, with both public and private, well rounded committed to reaching and advancing equity across multi-generational populations and goes beyond the Sorority's Five-Point Programmatic Thrust. They have reach and impacted thousands of lives and continue to implement monthly programing that includes homeownership, fitness, health and mental health and various levels of civic engagement. Their proven track record collaborating with public officials, advocating for public policy changes that support women of color, and they continue to lead in diverse spaces with authenticity challenging structural inequity and working tirelessly to advance Women of Color.



Chittadaphone Phouthavong is a leader whose work in public health reflects extraordinary compassion, resilience, and a deep commitment to the people she serves. Chitta (pronounced like the Cheetah cat) is the kind of person who transforms systems not by force, but by the quiet, consistent power of showing up for others with empathy and integrity.

Her leadership in healthcare is rooted in a profound understanding of what it means to care for people who are navigating unimaginable challenges. Whether she is supporting families who have just arrived in the United States or guiding individuals through complex medical systems, she brings a level of humanity that is rare and deeply needed. She doesn't just provide care she restores dignity. She creates safety. She makes people feel like they matter.

Chitta has dedicated her career to serving communities who often feel unseen: refugees, immigrants, and individuals who carry the weight of trauma, displacement, and uncertainty. She meets them with patience, cultural humility, and a genuine desire to understand their stories. Her ability to bridge gaps — linguistic, cultural, emotional — is a form of leadership that cannot be taught. It comes from lived experience, from heart, and from a calling to serve.

Her colleagues describe her as someone who leads by example:

- She steps into difficult situations with calm and clarity.
- She advocates fiercely for equitable access to care.
- She mentors others with generosity and openness.
- She brings compassion into every interaction, no matter how busy or demanding the day.

What makes Chitta exceptional is not just her skill as a public health professional, but the way she carries her purpose. She understands that healthcare is not only about treatment it is about trust, belonging, and healing. She embodies these values in every space she enters.

Her impact is felt in the families who breathe a little easier because she is there to guide them. In the communities who finally feel seen and supported. In the young people who look at her and realize that leadership can look like them, sound like them, and come from stories like theirs.

Chitta is a force for good steady, compassionate, and deeply committed to equity. Her work is changing lives in ways that are both profound and lasting. She is exactly the kind of leader this award is meant to honor.



For more than two decades, Dr. Latise Hairston, has been Champion of Equity, promoting health/wellness and economic inclusion at the system, community and individual levels across the globe while amplifying the voices and experiences of women and young women of color! She is a well-respected DEI practitioner, LMHC, Researcher, Evaluator, Educator, Doula, Peer Advocate and So much more. She mentors many and promotes more than wellness but Healing of the mind, body and soul. Not only is the champion of Equity, but an ambassador always willing to jump in and help, consult, counsel and uplift those around her. She has served corporate audiences, international retreats, university department, non- profits, community groups, government departments all over the country and each year presents at the national associated of back Psychologist Conference. She is loyal, committed, and loves to have fun! For more than four years, she has been a part of the planning or facilitating at the WOC Summit and many pay equity day events and so much more pushing us on every level to amplify women of color in the workplace and addressing unequal access in the workplace. It is with great pleasure that we acknowledge her as the WOC Champion of Equity Ambassador.



Our Virtual Keynote Speakers

Kendra Brim is a dynamic leader, strategist, entrepreneur, and TEDx speaker dedicated to advancing leadership development, community impact, and organizational excellence. She currently serves as Vice President of Programs and Organizational Advancement, where she designs and leads transformative leadership experiences that connect individuals across

sectors and equip them to drive meaningful change. In this role, she oversees flagship programs, cultivates strategic partnerships, and builds innovative pathways for civic engagement and professional growth.

With nearly a decade of leadership and service across organizations such as the United Way of Buffalo and Erie County, Say Yes Buffalo, and the Buffalo Urban League, including board and national roles within the National Urban League Young Professionals, Kendra brings a deep commitment to community-centered leadership. Her work is grounded in the belief that strong, connected leaders are essential to building thriving, inclusive communities and reflects a sustained dedication to advancing equity, access, and opportunity.

Kendra is the founder of K. Savannah Consulting, where she partners with organizations to execute strategy, align operations, and strengthen leadership capacity through a tailored, non-cookie-cutter approach rooted in strategy execution, operational alignment, and cross-sector collaboration. She is also the creator of Out of Bounds, a platform designed to support athletes and high performers as they navigate identity, purpose, and life beyond the game, and the founder of Black Restaurant Week, an initiative that highlights and supports Black-owned culinary businesses while fostering economic empowerment and cultural celebration.

A former Division I basketball player at Colgate University, a high school basketball Hall of Famer, and an MBA graduate of the University at Buffalo, Kendra's journey continues to inform her work. Her experiences shape her perspective on resilience, discipline, and redefining success beyond external achievement.

As a TEDx speaker and thought partner, Kendra brings authenticity, strategic insight, and energy to every space she enters, helping individuals and organizations evolve, lead with intention, and create lasting impact.

Taina B. Martinez, MSW is the Chief Executive Officer of Baltic Street Wellness Solutions, a nationally recognized peer-led organization advancing mental health and substance use recovery through equity-driven systems change and workforce development. A visionary leader with over 20 years of experience in mental health and substance use services, she has successfully expanded programs, secured multi-million-dollar grants, and spearheaded organizational growth and rebranding initiatives.

Taina is actively involved in several committees and boards across New York State. She serves as Board Treasurer of the Alliance for Rights and Recovery (formerly the New York Association of Psychiatric Rehabilitation Services, NYAPRS), and Board President of In Ya Head Academy. She is also an organizational member of WCNY-IPA and the APS Advisory Council and has contributed to the development and oversight of the MHA National Certified Peer Specialist exam.

Taina earned her MSW from Stony Brook University and looks forward to pursuing a Ph.D. focused on researching transgenerational trauma and systemic oppression within the mental health and justice systems.