

Golub Capital Social Impact Fellows Join TALI's Inaugural National Executive Leadership Academy Cohort

How can we increase the number of Black executives in top leadership positions? The Advanced Leadership Institute (“TALI”), a Pittsburgh-based non-profit, has developed a proven solution.

“We have tangible evidence that our leadership programs work, and after five years of successfully operating our Executive Leadership Academy regionally, we made the decision to expand it and take it national,” said Evan Frazier, the CEO and President of TALI. “Over 90% of the first two Executive Leadership Academy cohorts received promotions and/or additional responsibilities within two years of completing the program. Our graduates often describe their TALI experience as transformational,” added Frazier, “indicating that they are more confident, better prepared and connected, more strategic in how they approach their career, and ultimately stronger leaders.”

The participants selected for TALI's first cohort of the National Executive Leadership Academy bring a wide range of life and leadership experience, as cohort members



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Faith Cooper, Golub Capital Social Impact Fellow

Faith Akovi Cooper and Chymeka Olfonse exemplify. Cooper, who comes from the International Rescue Committee, and Olfonse, who comes from the Robin Hood Foundation, were selected as the first two Golub Capital Social Impact Fellows and both have unique perspectives that are sure to enrich the program experience for all participants.

Faith Akovi Cooper has dedicated her life's work to serving humanity and this passion has taken her to over 40 countries across Africa, Asia, Europe, Latin America and more. “When I was ten years old, the brutal civil war erupted in Liberia and I was forced to flee with my grandparents,” recalled Cooper. “We walked for many days and weeks with little to no food, drinking creek water to survive and reach a neighboring country. I saw some of the worst human atrocities along the way that no child should ever have to experience.” She and her family lived in refugee camps for years before resettling to the United States.

Despite this ordeal, Cooper observed, “I don't regret the experience; it made me who I am today, a humanitarian on a mission to empower vulnerable populations, especially refugees and their communities. Refugees bring far more to their new country than the limited to no possessions they arrive with – rich culture, skills, and life experiences,” she observed. Her story is certainly proof of that.

Cooper has used her own experiences to great effect in a range of senior leadership roles in the global health and humanitarian sectors. She previously served as the Regional Advisor and Program Lead for West Africa Disaster Preparedness Initiative, a U.S. Government funded

Ebola training effort for 15 West African countries during the Ebola outbreak. Faith oversaw program coordination, supporting efforts to train over 1,500 disaster management professionals from across the ECOWAS Region (West Africa) at the Kofi Annan International Peacekeeping Training Center in Ghana. Few years after, she was recruited by the IRC to head its Liberia country office, which was “very moving,” according to Cooper: “I fled this nation as a child. It was humbling to be able to return with my own two children, who were then 4 and 8 years old, to contribute to Liberia’s development. When I shared my own story with women and young people it really stuck with them. Working in a space that had caused so much pain, was healing for me.”

In her current role as Regional Director, Resettlement, Asylum, and Integration (RAI) at the IRC, she oversees nine offices comprising of more than 600 staff and upwards of \$100 million in the services IRC provides to refugees and asylum seekers on the U.S. southern border. She enjoys putting all of her diplomatic, leadership and people centered as well as stakeholder engagement skills to good use to help clients resettle with dignity in the U.S. “We are providing life-saving services – food, shelter, legal support – to those who need them most,” said Cooper.

The other inaugural Golub Capital Social Impact Fellow, Olfonse, has drawn on her own rich personal and family experience to lead the \$23M+ Adults and Household Supports grant portfolio for the Robin Hood Foundation. She and her team invest in over 100 organizations who are addressing critical issues such as food insecurity and the lack of affordable housing and access to high-quality jobs. “What’s distinctive about Robin Hood’s approach,” observed Olfonse, “is that we try to understand the nature of an issue deeply, identify who is



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tackling it well, and invest in strategies that offer the most impactful, long-term solution. For example, rather than focusing on rapid attachment placements which can get people back into work but in dead-end jobs, we think it better to invest in training programs that help someone get the skills needed to earn a family-sustaining wage.”

Her decision to pursue a career in non-profit management stemmed from the values instilled by her mother, a nurse who emigrated from Belize to the U.S., and her extended family. “We emphasize education and finding ways to help others,” recalled Olfonse. “Growing up in the Bronx, I saw issues created by the lack of resources and systemic inequities, and I wanted to look for ways to make a difference.”

After graduating from Yale, she took a job with the NYC Department of Education, where she began to tackle these inequities. “I visited school computer labs, which had no computers. My role was to help direct donor dollars to address needs where they could add the most value.”

She went on to leadership roles at several NYC non-profits – among them, JumpStart for Young Children, Minds Matter and BUILD NYC – where she learned the importance of being

able to quantify information and demonstrate benefits, as well as how to manage people. She joined Robin Hood 11 months ago because she “saw philanthropy as a way to have more leverage and impact. A chance to unlock larger resources from government by focusing on policy. We focus on how to improve the economic mobility for individuals by addressing core underlying issues.”

ideas for staff development and ways to scale programs to serve thousands or even millions.” She added: “I’m also looking forward to the session on building your individual brand. That’s not something I’ve thought much about before.”

They are also pleased to be part of TALl’s first national cohort: “We’ll have chance to shape

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this experience for ourselves and future cohorts,” noted Olfonse. Both were attracted to TALl because, as Cooper observed, it “particularly focused on black executives, intentionally designing opportunities for them to build their network

Excited About TALl

Both are looking forward to the start of TALl’s National Executive Leadership Academy. “I’ve always sought out leadership development,” said Cooper. “I was due to participate in the IRC’s internal leadership development program, but as that was starting, COVID hit. I’ve been so busy over the last few years, volunteering in the community and taking care of my family on top of a demanding day job, I haven’t had a chance for formal training or to reflect on my own leadership development. I’m excited to build new tools and skills.”

Olfonse is excited about “the curriculum that will be covered: learning ways to influence decision-making, how to work with wider stakeholders, and new

and connectivity and to enable them to grow professionally and personally.”

“The Golub Capital Social Impact Fellows will bring an important nonprofit leadership perspective that has value across various industries and sectors,” concluded Frazier. “They will also bring a mission-focused approach and unique experiences that all cohort members will learn from. I believe that having GC Fellows a part of the inaugural National Executive Leadership Academy cohort will enrich everyone’s experience.”

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