



AALA

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# PROGRAM OVERVIEW

The African American Leadership Academy (AALA) is a community-based leadership development program that expands both the number and effectiveness of African American leaders in central Ohio. Individuals accepted into the Academy come with a demonstrated excellence in their profession, a commitment to public or community service and the desire to succeed. The Academy exists to assure an increasing diversity of leadership. Its Leadership Development Program is guided by a philosophy expressed by Warren Bennis, well known author and chairman of the Advisory Board of the Center for Public Leadership at Harvard University's Kennedy School. He stated:

**“To become a leader,  
you must first become who you are.”**



# About the Academy

- Founded in 2005 by a group of Columbus African American leaders
- Each cohort consists of 20 Fellows from private, entrepreneurial, non-profit, government and education sectors
- Duration is ten months
- Strength based curriculum focused on efficacy, leadership agility and leadership interaction
- Over 400 alumni Fellows to date; AALA will celebrate its 20-year anniversary in 2026

## OUR WHY

We cannot “hope” that capable African American leaders will continue to emerge in our **community**. Invested individuals and groups must work to ensure that there is a continuous pipeline of high-quality leaders for an increasingly diverse community.

Maximizing the potential and engagement of all social and economic sectors is essential to the greater purpose of building innovative and “best at” businesses and communities.

AALA’s vision is to enlarge the definition of success and redefine leadership to include doing well (career/professionally), so you can also do good (the needed “good” in our community and life).



# HOW OUR BOARD IS GOVERNED

An Advisory Board governs the Academy. The Board is made up of representatives from the Academy's sponsoring organizations as well as other prominent community leaders. Robert 'Bo' Chilton chairs the AALA Advisory Board. Donna James and Mo Wright serve as Co- Executive Directors.



**MO  
WRIGHT**  
Executive  
Director



**DONNA  
JAMES**  
Founder



**ROBERT "BO"  
CHILTON**  
AALA Advisory  
Board Chair



**TRISTAN  
HALL**  
AALA Advisory  
Vice Board Chair



## AALA Program Structure

Each year, the Advisory Board seeks out and nominates 40 leaders, from the private, entrepreneurial, nonprofit, government, and educational sectors who demonstrate potential for top leadership roles in their professional and civic life

The AALA curriculum focuses on how leaders can become more of who they are, authentically, through two development tracts — “Efficacy” and “Leadership Agility”

Therefore, meeting for eight (8) sessions — in the evening and on weekends — from January through August, the curriculum is shaped to incorporate the following throughout the program year:

- Professional resources (faculty-mentors, guest speakers, and a professional/career strategist).
- Strategies for success grounded in a customized Efficacy for Professionals of Color curriculum. This curriculum is specifically designed to increase confidence and competence in the political, social and relational arenas. It enables the development of the right mindset for producing the highest return on an investment of time and effort for professionals of color. The Academy Fellows explore issues of negotiating race and gender in our society and identify what’s getting in the way of being their most effective self.
- Strengths based leadership principles.
- Specific tools for making better connections and a four-step technique (Aware, Reflect, Target, & Try) help to deepen the attributes that accelerate leadership agility and make a more effective leader. Academy Fellows learn how to better align their distinctive approach to leadership with their own values, beliefs, and personal goals.

➤ **Individual presentations using the Five C's; each Fellow gathers their self- learning, observations, and vision to present to the group on the following "Five C's":**

- Clarity: Say something about your emerging sense of your own leadership voice. Who are you, who do you want to be, and what does that mean for your leadership?
- Challenges: What are the things you need to change and the things you need to learn to meet these challenges?
- Career: Are you presently in the right place to exercise your voice and work on the changes? If not, what direction do you need to take to move forward?
- Connections: Who are the people you want to stay connected with both inside and outside of this room as you go forward on this leadership journey?
- Community: What are the community issues that most move or call to you, and in which you want to become involved or continue current involvement?

➤ **Reflective Evaluation: An ongoing process of self-evaluation that occurs throughout the program by continuously asking the following questions:**

- What are you discovering about yourself?
- What new directions do you wish to pursue?
- What are you not getting that you need?

## PROGRAM GOAL

**The goal is for each Fellow to graduate with a clearer sense of personal and professional strengths, more confidence to effectively pursue their passions, and an increased commitment to shaping our community. By the end of the program, Fellows have skills and confidence to achieve the following:**

- Become more self-aware of their personal leadership style and strengths
- Enhance their understanding of areas that are critical to their personal growth, community growth, and leadership capabilities
- Identify their most and least effective leadership attributes and skills
- Develop personal strategies for maximizing talents
- Understand the difference between and the role of talent, knowledge, and skills
- Develop personal strategies for greater success in achieving career, community and life goals
- Develop a sense of community and collaboration among and between all classes of fellows