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Valeisha Butterfield Jones On Centering Sisterhood As She Works To Change The Music Industry

THE COPRESIDENT OF THE RECORDING ACADEMY DISCUSSES THE ORGANIZATION'S NEW INCLUSION RIDER, BLACK MUSIC COLLECTIVE, AND THE LONELINESS OF LEADERSHIP.



BY [TAYLOR CRUMPTON](#) · [UPDATED FEBRUARY 22, 2022](#)

During [Valeisha Butterfield Jones](#)'s first month as the [Recording Academy](#)'s chief diversity and inclusion officer, [George Floyd](#) was





When Jones saw the social media campaign, tagged [#TheShowMustBePaused](#), she called Thomas and said, “Sis, we have your back. Whatever you need, I got you.” Now, as the copresident of the Recording Academy, Jones continues to use her position to uplift others. Here, she talks about the power of sisterhood in male-dominated spaces and the importance of using data to spearhead inclusion.

ESSENCE: The Recording Academy launched the [Black Music Collective \(BMC\)](#) in September 2020. What steps have been taken since then to ensure that Black voices in music are being amplified?

Valeisha Butterfield Jones: The Black Music Collective is the vision of board member [Rigo] Riggs Morales. He said, ‘I want to drive accountability by bringing together the best and brightest minds in Black music, to be our thought partners and work with us to drive change.’

When we developed it, we had to be intentional. [Debra Lee](#) and [Sylvia Rhone](#) are in the advisory group because we knew we had to center Black woman as part of the strategy. Not only are we in positions where we can drive change, but also we feel a great responsibility to make sure we are advancing and ensuring equitable outcomes for everyone.

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We have already seen progress around the goals of accountability and partnership in the voting membership at the Recording Academy. We set Black-representation goals, and we’re getting closer to achieving them in every area of the work that we’re doing.





LOS ANGELES, CALIFORNIA - JUNE 09: RECORDING ACADEMY HEADSHOTS ON JUNE 09, 2021 IN LOS ANGELES, CALIFORNIA. (PHOTO BY MATT WINKELMEYER/GETTY IMAGES)

ESSENCE: What other data-driven initiatives are you leading as copresident?

Jones: For us, it's really about being intersectional. We just released the [first inclusion rider](#) for a music-awards show. Similar to film and television,





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Black women, Asian women, -Latinx women and Indigenous women. We will also be looking at veterans and creators with disabilities, as well as age and gender disparities.

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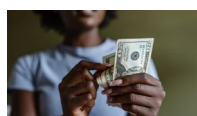
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Jones: Sometimes we forget that leadership can be lonely. When you pick up the phone to motivate, support or have the back of another Black woman, you'd be surprised how many of us need it. There have been many hard moments for me, -working in such a male-dominated industry. Those little moments of sisterhood—a five-minute call, a short text, a coffee break or a Zoom with our girls—end up being the fuel that gets us through the rest of the year.

I'm inspired by what we in music were able to do together over the last year. We're helping to change the trajectory of how we, as a community, are valued and prioritized in this industry. But I'm more inspired by the power of sisterhood in this movement. There's such a model in front of us, now, of how to lift as we climb.

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