

## **The Cocreation of a Safe Space that Centers Women of Color Academics**

### **Ms. Jameka Wiggins, The Ohio State University**

Jameka Wiggins is a Ph.D. Candidate in Engineering Education, specializing in Organizational Change in Higher Education and Industry at The Ohio State University. Concurrently, she is pursuing a Master's in Engineering Management. Jameka's current research explores how engineering faculties' positionality and lived experiences shape their critical consciousness development. As a scholar and advocate, she seeks to amplify the voices of underrepresented groups in engineering by exploring their experiences, engaging in critical questioning, and offering support. Outside of academic studies, Jameka serves as an ambassador for her department, reviewer for ASEE, and active volunteer for a Columbus STEM non-profit See Brilliance. Jameka has been recognized by her undergraduate institution for her commitment to achieving the vision of the Ronald E. McNair Scholars Program and most recently by her department for her scholarship as a graduate researcher. Jameka strives to be a well-rounded scholar and exhibit her dedication to people and scholarship.

### **Dr. Monica Cox, The Ohio State University**

Monica F. Cox, Ph.D., is Professor in the Department of Engineering Education at The Ohio State University.

### **Mrs. Monique S. Ross, The Ohio State University**

Monique Ross earned a doctoral degree in Engineering Education from Purdue University. She has a Bachelor's degree in Computer Engineering from Elizabethtown College, a Master's degree in Computer Science and Software Engineering from Auburn University

### **Shawanee' Patrick, The Ohio State University**



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PRESENTED BY: JAMEKA WIGGINS

# ***Motivation***

The motivation for creating the PROPEL Cluster was derived from the experiences & treatment of Women of Color, especially Black women professionals (e.g., faculty, postdocs, students, staff), in STEM spaces.



# ***Literature***

Critical gaps in support structures for Women of Color (WoC) faculty within academic institutions (Lean In Org and McKinsey & Co. (2023), Abdalla (2018)).



***Institutional  
Betrayal:  
Smith & Freyd  
(2014)***



***Experiences of  
WoC Faculty:  
Abdalla  
(2018)***





***Hush  
Harbors:  
Nunley  
(2007)***



***Disparities in  
Advancement:  
McKinsey &  
Company (2023)***

# ***Current Work at U.S. Universities***

## University of Arizona

- Faculty Only:
  - Women of Color Faculty Collective
  - Black Faculty Group
- Faculty & Staff
  - Sankofa Black Staff & Faculty Association

## Rice University

- Women Faculty Affinity Group
- Faculty of Color Affinity Group

## University of Minnesota

- University Indigenous Women and Women of Color

# ***Current Work at U.S. Universities (cont.)***

## Emory School of Medicine

- African American Women Collaborative

## The Ohio State University

- Black Women Faculty & Professional Staff Affinity Group

***Progressive Research on  
Organizational Equity &  
Learning (PROPEL)  
Cluster***





# ***About the Cluster***

The Ohio State University created a Feminist Research, Education and Engagement (FREE Center) focused on bringing together engaged feminist researchers and teaching to unite individuals across the university's academic community.

The Center is supported by a five-year \$500,000 grant for collaborative research and community engagement projects centering on feminist approaches and perspectives.



# ***PROPEL*** ***Current Work***



PROPEL received a \$1,000 seed grant to convene a team focused on research to organizational equity and learning.



# ***Cluster Members***



**Dr. Ashli Wright**

Postdoctoral  
Scholar  
Biology



**Dr. Monique Ross**

Associate Professor  
Engineering Education  
Computer Science



**Dr. Monica Cox**

Distinguished  
Professor  
Engineering  
Education



**Dr. Shawaneé Patrick**

Postdoctoral  
Scholar  
Mechanical Engineering



**Jameka Wiggins**

Ph.D. Candidate  
Engineering Education

# ***Guiding Principles:***

-  Community & Support Networks
-  Centering Black Women in Academia & STEM
-  Navigating Work Spaces
-  Trust & Authenticity
-  Partnerships & External Engagement

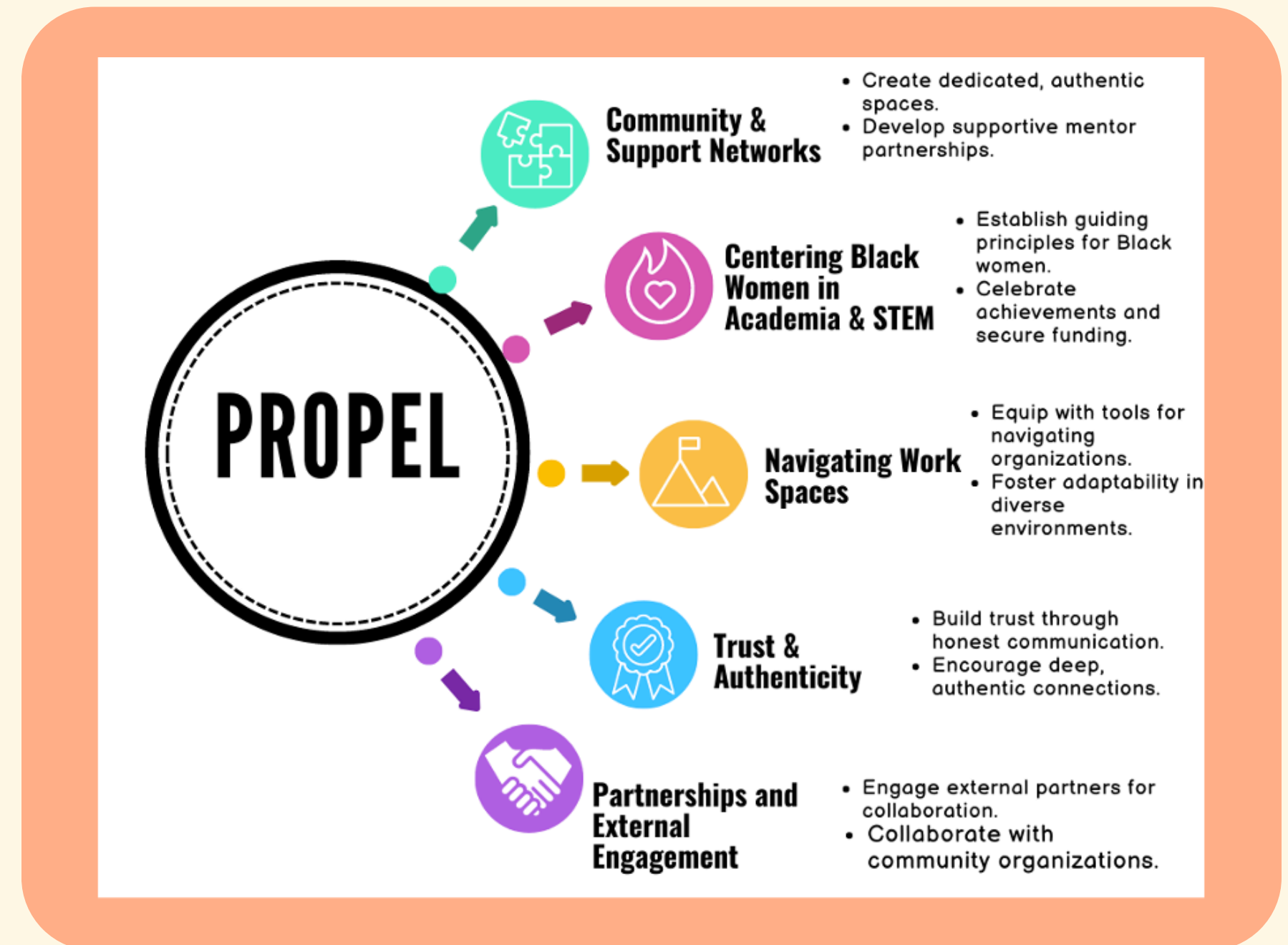




# Goals of Guiding Principles

The goal of the guiding principles is to cultivate an environment where cluster members can:

- Trust one another
- Engage in authentic dialogue
- Gain strategies on navigating the workplace
- Find the light and joy In the darkness
- Work with others to make collective change



# ***Cluster Activities***



## ***Books***

Purchased four different texts focused on WoC professional development & feminist thought.



## ***Networking***

Members of the cluster attended a series of networking events hosted by Zora's House.

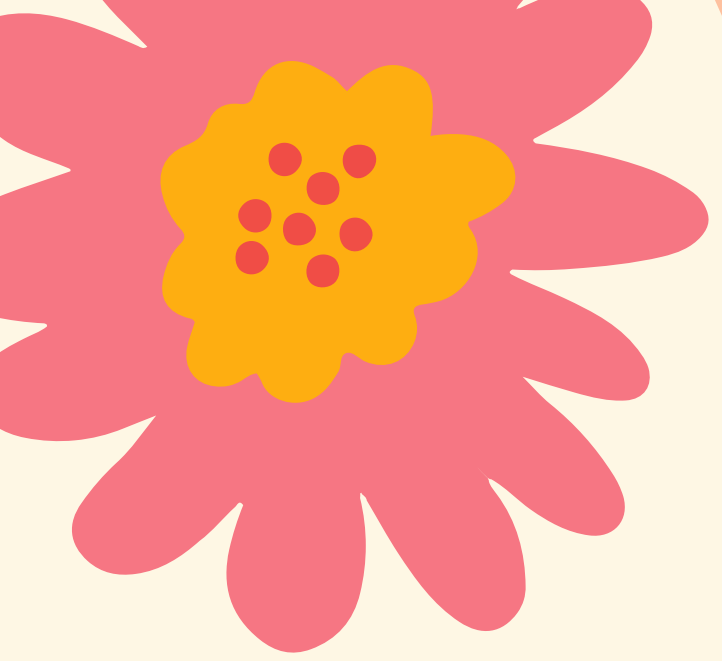


## ***Presenting***

The cluster is working to expand its reach by sharing its knowledge and principles with others academics.



***Lessons Learned from  
PROPEL Cluster***



# ***Findings***

A need for a comprehensive audit of existing university policies, particularly those concerning workplace abuse, discrimination, and harassment, to pinpoint where they fall short in providing procedural justice for WoC faculty and staff.









## ***Cognitive Dissonance (DeGruy, 2016)***

- We have rules, but are they real?
- We say we value diversity, but why are diverse groups being harmed?
- We hire new WoC, but we don't take care of the WoC we have.
- We conduct performance reviews, but where is the accountability?
- The system offers support, but does this support really help?
- We have university values, but why do people not feel safe at work?



# ***Recommendations***

-  Creating spaces for women to speak openly and freely without (i.e., hush harbors) fear of retaliation
-  Facilitating open discussions among WoC faculty
-  Engage university administrators to foster a supportive network for implementing identified best practices
-  Being proactive vs. reactive, integrating restorative justice to address wrongdoing



# ***Navigating New Legislation***

With the rise of anti-DEI legislation and election results, there are important questions to discuss:

What does a PROPEL Cluster look like in this climate? Could this exist in the confines of anti-DEI legislation?

How do you navigate spaces and relationships with individuals that prioritize legislation/laws over the care and safety of peers?

What are ways to work through the tensions and consequences as one continues to do the work?



# ***Future Work***



Continue cluster meetings & expand to involve other members of campus



Expand to other local universities



Partner with local and campus organizations such as Zora's House






# ***PROPEL in Action***

*“For the master’s tool will never dismantle the master’s house.” – Audre Lorde*






# ***What is Important to You?***

Take a moment to reflect on your ideal working environment. What elements are essential for you to thrive in an environment that centers women of color? Are these elements present in your current work environment?





# ***What do you need?***

-  Does your institution currently have an affinity group or space that supports WoC faculty & staff?
-  What current and developing identities do you need supported beyond your professional identity?
-  What does your ideal PROPEL look like? What does it include? Who is represented?



***How can the PROPEL  
support you?***



***Thank you for  
listening!***

Don't hesitate to ask any questions!

