

AACUC Names Inaugural Maurice R. Smith DEI Leadership Award Recipients

Honorees to be Celebrated at the 25th Anniversary AACUC Annual Conference in July

SNELLVILLE, GA, UNITED STATES, May 3, 2023 /EINPresswire.com/ -- The African-American Credit Union Coalition ([AACUC](#)) has named the inaugural Maurice R. Smith DEI Leadership Award recipients, who will be honored during the 25th Anniversary AACUC Annual Conference on Wednesday, July 19, 2023 at the Atlanta Evergreen Lakeside Resort in Stone Mountain, GA. The Honorees include four individuals and one organization:

- Martin Eakes, CEO, Self-Help Credit Union and Self-Help Federal Credit Union
- Juan Fernandez, President/CEO, Credit Union Association of New Mexico
- Gigi Hyland, Executive Director, National Credit Union Foundation
- Diane Rector, Consumer Affairs Analyst, National Credit Union Administration
- Self-Help Credit Union

Earlier this year, the AACUC Board of Directors voted unanimously to rename the organization's DEI Trailblazer Award to the Maurice R. Smith DEI Leadership Award in honor of retired CEO of both Local Government Federal Credit Union and Civic Federal Credit Union and current AACUC Board Chairman. Honorees are



Maurice R. Smith DEI Leadership Award Honorees



selected based on the following criteria:

- Diversity, Equity and Inclusion thought leadership
- Demonstrated commitment and passion for engaging others in DEI
- Social impact of their work in the credit union community and our society

“Everyone in the credit union movement not only knows who Maurice R. Smith is, but they also revere his efforts and accomplishments to make our movement more diverse, equitable and inclusive,” said AACUC President/CEO Renée Sattiewhite. “In the spirit of what and for whom the Maurice R. Smith DEI Leadership Award stands, I couldn’t think of a more prolific inaugural set of individuals and organizations to represent our beloved Maurice R. Smith.”

Martin Eakes is the CEO of Self-Help Credit Union and Self-Help Federal Credit Union. In 2002, he helped establish the Center for Responsible Lending, an affiliate of Self-Help, that battles predatory mortgage and payday lenders across the country and fights to protect homeownership and family wealth for working families. Eakes is a well-decorated credit union executive and has been recognized with national awards including the National Credit Union Foundation’s Wegner Award, the Leadership Conference on Civil and Human Rights’ Hubert Humphrey Award and Ford Foundation’s Visionary Award, to name a few. Martin holds a Bachelor of Arts in philosophy and physics from Davidson College, a Juris Doctorate from Yale Law School and a Master of Arts from Princeton’s School of Public and International Affairs.

Juan Fernandez is the President/CEO of the Credit Union Association of New Mexico (CUANM). Over the course of his nearly 20-year credit union tenure, which he began as a teller during college, he has led credit unions’ community development efforts in New York, assisting them in seizing opportunities to serve unmet needs in their communities and achieving sustainable growth. He and his team are credited with drafting legislative initiatives – that ultimately passed – to lower the compliance burden and enable credit unions to reach more markets and communities. He recently launched programs to help New Mexico credit unions achieve CDFI certification and serve needs that went unmet by other financial institutions. He holds a Bachelor of Arts in Economics from Binghamton University and a Master of Business Administration from Western Governors University.

Gigi Hyland serves as the Executive Director for the National Credit Union Foundation, the philanthropic and social responsibility leader of America's credit union movement. In her role, she ignites and inspires credit union professionals to put consumer financial health and cooperative principles at the heart of their business strategy. Her career in credit unions spans 30 years as an advocate, attorney, federal regulator and now philanthropist. She is a Credit Union Development Educator and Certified Credit Union Financial Counselor. Hyland serves on the America Saves® Advisory Board and the National Cooperative Bank Board of Directors, chairing its Board Risk Committee. In 2022, she was inducted into the America’s Credit Union Museum Herstory exhibit, which highlights a range of credit union women and their achievements in the industry.

Diane Rector is the Consumer Affairs Analyst for the National Credit Union Administration (NCUA). She advocates for making NCUA a workplace more equitable and inclusive for people with visible and invisible disabilities. Joining NCUA in 1997, her past roles include leading, developing and implementing consumer education and outreach initiatives for credit unions. She has collaborated with various agencies and financial institutions to provide resources and training to credit unions relating to expanding access to financial resources and financial needs to underserved communities. Her work also includes providing strategic counsel and programs that support Diversity, Inclusion, and Equity. She holds a Master of Business Administration from Strayer University.

Self-Help, co-founded by Martin Eakes and Bonnie Wright in 1980, is a community development lender. Self-Help has provided \$13 billion in financing to more than 200,000 homebuyers, small businesses and nonprofits. Self-Help reaches people who are underserved by conventional lenders – particularly persons of color, immigrants, women, rural residents, and low-wealth families. Self-Help has 75 branch offices in North Carolina, California, Illinois, Florida, South Carolina, Virginia, Wisconsin and Washington. The Self-Help nonprofit family includes two credit unions. Self-Help Credit Union is a North Carolina state-chartered credit union that started with a \$77 bake sale in 1984 and now has 93,000 members and \$1.8 billion in assets. Self-Help Federal Credit Union was chartered in 2008 and has 101,000 members and \$2 billion in assets.

More information about the Maurice R. Smith DEI Leadership Award and past DEI Trailblazer Honorees can be found at www.aacuhof.org/trailblazers.

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About the African-American Credit Union Coalition (AACUC)

The AACUC is a 501(c)(3) non-profit organization created to increase diversity within the credit union community through advocacy and professional development. Recipient of the 2022 Anchor Award from the National Credit Union Foundation for its leadership and global efforts unifying financial industries in eradicating racism amid the COVID-19 pandemic and social unrest in 2020 with its Commitment to Change: Credit Unions Unite Against Racism initiative, AACUC has become an all-encompassing organization for executives, professionals, volunteers, consultants and regulators within the financial services industry. AACUC is considered a leader in the credit union movement, adopting the 8th Cooperative Principle (Diversity, Equity and Inclusion) and enabling credit unions to become more diverse and inclusive. Learn more at <https://www.aacuc.org/>.

About the Maurice R. Smith DEI Leadership Award

The Maurice R. Smith DEI Leadership Award – originally the DEI Trailblazers Award – recognizes leaders and organizations that inspire accountability for collective Diversity, Equity and Inclusion (DEI) efforts in the credit union movement and blaze the trail for others to follow. Honorees are selected based on the following criteria: Diversity, Equity and Inclusion thought leadership, demonstrated commitment and passion for engaging others in DEI and social impact of their work in the credit union community and our society. Learn more at

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African-American Credit Union Coalition

+1 678-587-5111

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