

Shaping The Future Of The Creative Economy

An Interview with Stacy Milner, President and Chief Executive Officer, Entertainment Industry College Outreach Program

EDITORS' NOTE Stacy Milner is an entertainment industry veteran who began her career working as the executive assistant to the chairmen of NBC and Paramount Pictures. She is the Founder and CEO of Executive Temps, a premier employment agency that has exclusively served the entertainment industry for over 30 years. Her latest venture, the Entertainment Industry College Outreach Program (EICOP), was created to help bridge the gap between higher education and the entertainment industry by creating



Stacy Milner

access, opportunity, and workforce pathways for emerging talent. Through its immersive workforce development programs, EICOP (eicop.org) connects students from Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs) and other Minority Serving Institutions (MSIs) to paid work experiences, mentorship, professional development, housing support, and direct industry engagement with many of the world's leading entertainment, media, sports, and communications organizations. Milner is passionate about expanding access and opportunity and developing the next generation of industry leaders. She devotes her time to preparing college students, recent graduates, and emerging professionals to successfully navigate and build careers across the evolving creative economy. Her commitment to equipping the next generation is the driving force behind EICOP and its flagship programs, including HBCU IN LA®, HBCU IN NY®, and HBCU IN ATL®. HBCU IN LA® is a fund of the Entertainment Industry Foundation. Through EICOP's immersive model, students gain hands-on professional experience while building the networks, skills, and industry exposure necessary to pursue long-term careers in entertainment and related sectors. Milner has been recognized and honored among Hollywood's most influential women for this important work, including being named one of Variety's Women of Impact honorees. Milner is a visionary entrepreneur, workforce development leader, and career strategist dedicated to building pathways between industry and emerging talent.

Will you discuss your career journey?

My career journey began shortly after I moved from Ohio to California. I started as an NBC Page, giving studio tours and getting a first-hand look at how the entertainment industry operated behind the scenes. That experience opened the door for me to work alongside some of the

industry's most influential leaders, including serving senior executives and chairmen at NBC and Paramount Pictures.

I often say that the entertainment industry became my classroom. Early in my career, I had the opportunity to learn at the coattails of legendary executives like Brandon Tartikoff and Grant Tinker during one of NBC's most transformative eras. Watching how they led, made decisions, built relationships, and navigated the industry gave me an education that shaped the way I view leadership and opportunity to this

day. Exposure to that level of leadership reinforced something I still believe strongly: exposure, access, and mentorship can fundamentally change the trajectory of a person's career.

I later founded Executive Temps, a staffing firm built specifically for the entertainment industry, and wrote the book *Leveraging Up! The Key to Launching Your Entertainment Career*, which took me on a college tour across the country. It was during visits to Historically Black Colleges and Universities that I saw something I could not ignore. The students were talented, driven, and passionate about the industry. What they lacked was proximity to it. The industry was not in their backyard, the professional networks were not accessible to them,

and even when opportunities existed, many could not afford to pursue them.

What started as a grassroots HBCU book tour in 2010 soon drew the attention of the Obama Administration's White House Initiative on HBCUs, which helped elevate the conversation nationally. A subsequent roundtable in Los Angeles with major industry leaders made two barriers undeniable: most HBCUs were not geographically connected to major entertainment markets, and many students from low-wealth households could not afford to pursue opportunities outside their immediate regions. That led to the creation of EICOP and its immersive workforce development model, built around paid opportunities, housing support, mentorship, and long-term career pathways designed to help emerging talent not just enter the industry, but sustain careers within it.

How do you define EICOP's mission?

We believe talent is everywhere. Access is not. That is the foundation of everything EICOP does. EICOP's mission is to create access, opportunity, and workforce pathways for emerging talent, particularly students from Historically Black Colleges and Universities and other Minority Serving Institutions, who have historically had limited entry points into the entertainment industry and related sectors. At its core, we exist to bridge the gap between institutions and industry, connecting students to the professional



EICOP cohort goes behind the scenes at the iconic Rockefeller Center in New York

experiences, mentorship, and support systems they need to build lasting careers.

As the entertainment landscape continues to evolve, EICOP's work is evolving with it. Today, entertainment intersects with sports, gaming, music, technology, marketing, AI, digital media, and experiential storytelling in ways that did not exist years ago. Our mission is not simply to prepare students for one type of role, but to help develop the next generation of leaders, creators, executives, and innovators who will shape the future of the creative economy.

Will you provide an overview of EICOP's work?

EICOP serves as a workforce intermediary, connecting students and emerging professionals to career pathways across the entertainment industry and adjacent sectors through paid work experiences, mentorship, professional development, and direct industry engagement. Our flagship programs, HBCU IN LA, HBCU IN NY, and HBCU IN ATL, connect students to major entertainment and media markets through paid work experiences, mentorship, executive exposure, and immersive industry engagement. Every student also receives housing support. Removing financial and geographic barriers is not a program feature; it is what makes genuine access possible.



Stacy Milner enjoying time with the New York cohort after the wrap-up of welcome week

The model proved itself early. In our inaugural program, one student's experience was so impactful that the CEO of a major Los Angeles public relations firm created a role specifically for that student. Industry partners told me how rare that kind of conversion was, particularly given how competitive the industry can be. That early outcome set the standard we hold ourselves to. Today, EICOP maintains an 89 percent intern-to-hire conversion rate across our programs.

As industry partners saw the results, companies with offices in New York and Atlanta began asking whether they could host students in those markets as well. That organic demand led directly to the expansion of HBCU IN NY and HBCU IN ATL. Beyond placements, EICOP convenes industry leaders, educators, alumni, and emerging talent through speaker series, leadership summits, and



Cohort of summer interns in Los Angeles

professional development programming focused on long-term career connectivity across the evolving creative economy.

How critical has it been to build the EICOP team?

It has been everything. EICOP operates at the intersection of relationship management, program execution, industry credibility, and student support. None of that happens without people who understand both sides of the work and can navigate them with equal competence and care. What I have been intentional about building is a team with dual fluency. When a studio executive calls with a question or a student needs support, the team handles both conversations with the same level of seriousness and professionalism. That capacity is rare, and it is something we protect carefully as we grow. The trust EICOP has built across the industry over nearly a decade is inseparable from the quality of the people behind the work.

As EICOP scales into new markets and reaches a 10-year milestone, the team is scaling with it. The people who have grown with this organization carry both its history and its future. In a relationship-driven industry, that institutional knowledge is one of our most important assets.

How valuable is it to have such an engaged and committed board of directors?

An organization like EICOP lives on the credibility and connectivity of the people who champion it. I was intentional from the beginning about surrounding the organization with leaders who understood both the entertainment industry and the importance of creating meaningful pathways for emerging talent. That combination is not easy to find, and it has made a significant difference in how EICOP has been received, trusted, and sustained across the industry.

Our board members bring industry expertise, strategic relationships, and genuine belief in the mission. They open doors, make introductions, and advocate for EICOP in rooms where it matters. What I value most is that they engage as partners, not just advisors. They understand the

complexity of operating across both nonprofit and industry worlds, the pace at which entertainment moves, and the long-term commitment that workforce development requires.

Their contributions extend well beyond governance. They serve as advocates, connectors, mentors, and champions for everything EICOP is building. As we approach our 10-year gala in 2027 and define the next chapter of the organization, having a board that is deeply invested in where we are going is not a formality. It is foundational.

What are your priorities for EICOP?

The immediate priority is executing an exceptional summer. We have students going into MLB clubs and Minor League clubs, new sports partnerships launching, the Atlanta production training program launching with Shadowbox Studios, and our Disney Showcase is on the horizon. Everything happening this summer is both a program and a proof of concept for what EICOP looks like at scale.

Looking ahead, we are focused on deepening our presence in Atlanta, formalizing our sports expansion through the LA Sports Immersion Fellowship, and preparing for growth into Nashville as the next major creative market. Each market we enter requires building real relationships with local industry partners, educational institutions, and community stakeholders. We do not expand for scale alone. We expand when we can do it right.

As EICOP approaches its 10-year milestone, we are also focused on the organization's long-term sustainability through strategic fundraising and expanded industry partnerships. As these industries continue to evolve and intersect, we see significant opportunity to help shape a more connected and sustainable workforce ecosystem. The creative economy is changing faster than most institutions can keep pace with. EICOP's priority is to stay ahead of that curve and help define what the next generation of talent development looks like across entertainment, sports, gaming, AI, and media. ●