

COMMUNITY

# National Innovative Communities Conference: Creating a More Equitable Future



by **PRINCE JAMES STORY**  
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Diana Fox, Executive Director of Reach Out organization, and civil rights attorney Ben Crump pose together at the 12th annual National Innovative Communities Conference (NICC). Credit: Prince James Story/ VOICE

## Prince James Story

The message for the 2023 National Innovative Communities Conference (NICC) hosted by the Reach Out organization of Riverside, was how to create a more equitable society for future generations in the Inland

Region.

Held Tuesday and Wednesday, June 13-14, at the Riverside Convention Center, NICC is Southern California's largest community health conference. It brings together individuals and community leaders to connect with other leaders, share ideas and innovation, and discuss cutting-edge strategies to help improve the quality of life for all communities and residents.

More than three hundred and fifty people participated in this year's conference.

"After the pandemic, it has been hard to get people [to go out places]. People kind of got used to not going to meetings, not going to conferences, or everything being virtual. A lot of folks that are here today, it was a lot for them to come out," said Diana Fox, Executive Director of Reach Out.

"Some of the trauma that folks are carrying because of the pandemic, it's still lingering, and I think it will for quite some time. That's why it's even more meaningful to me that so many folks are here."

### **Building power equitably through dignity and justice**

This year's conference focused on building power equitably that honors people's dignity and promotes justice, so it only made sense for one of the keynote speakers to be civil rights attorney Ben Crump.



*"I don't know that there's any better representation of that than Ben Crump. He has fought to really make sure that those [whose] dignity is not being preserved, and in most cases, their lives are being taken [are not forgotten]," Fox said. (Courtesy: [facebook.com](https://www.facebook.com))*

Crump started his speech by talking about the letter written by Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. from a Birmingham jail in 1963.

Dr. King's message is that we have a "moral obligation" to oppose evil and injustice. . . . not to be complacent in its presence, he noted.

The idea Crump emphasized the most during his speech, was that everyone has a role to play in the battle for justice for all people.

"My grandmother said, 'Baby, whenever you get a chance to speak truth to power, you do it. Even when they say it's unpopular,'" Crump shared.

"Even when people criticize you, even when your palms are sweaty, and your heart is racing, she said. Even then, you should speak truth to power because if you don't do it, then who will. It doesn't matter what your

profession is. You could be a preacher, teacher, or in the medical field.”

Crump said everyone can help ensure that all children have an equal and just society.

During the speech, Crump also took a stand against censorship and book-banning policies implemented in states like Florida and Texas. He stressed how we are all tasked with fighting for the next generation, but we must also prepare them to advocate and fight for change when they come of age.

“We must ensure that young people know how to protest voter suppression, fight for quality healthcare, environmental racism, and environmental injustice, and be armed with the knowledge to protest denial to capital.”

In his closing remarks, Crump quotes from Dr. King’s speech in Washington D.C. delivered in February 1968, who said,

“On some positions, cowardice asks the question, is it safe? Expediency asks the question, is it politic? Vanity asks the question, is it popular? But conscience asks the question, is it right? And there comes a time when one must take a position that is neither safe, nor politic, nor popular, but he must take it because conscience tells him it is right.”

Crump ended his presentation with this last decree that when his time is up, and he looks at God, he wants to say that he stood up and fought for marginalized children to have a better opportunity for life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness.

Crump’s speech was a powerful call to action and when he finished the audience reacted with a standing round of applause. The reaction was proof positive that Reach Out’s decision to select Crump as one of the event’s keynote speakers not only aligned perfectly with its mission for the conference but also inspired those in attendance.