

Building Equity into Partnerships from the Start

The [Monthly Connect](#) is a series of virtual panel discussions on topics relevant to partnerships among state government, universities/colleges and other research institutions, philanthropy, and others. Monthly Connects are open to anyone interested in attending.

SESSION AT A GLANCE

Speakers discussed the meaning of equity, why it matters, what it requires, and highlighted how challenging but critical “doing the work” is. They also shared strategies for building equity into research and partnership opportunities and offered advice for organizations that want to do more and better in this space but don’t know where to start.

HIGHLIGHTS

Why does equity matter?

- An equity-oriented approach to partnerships can increase engagement and inclusivity by creating opportunities to hear more voices, especially of those affected by an issue, so that they can contribute to defining challenges and finding solutions.
- Using an equity-oriented approach in research can lead to more comprehensive and valid data by increasing the range of participants and perspectives and by expanding methodological approaches.
- Being equity-oriented is a reminder that not everyone starts with equal opportunities and that some people or groups of people have been deliberately excluded from policies and programs. Confronting this can lead to action that expands opportunities going forward.

What are strategies to increase equity?

- People in positions of power must share that power and learn how to lead more equitably. Do not rely on the individuals who have been historically left out, left behind, or marginalized to lead the efforts and education necessary to increase equity.
- Equity includes multiple demographic characteristics including, but not limited to, race, gender, income, employment status, geography, age, and disability. It can be impactful to think broadly about these (as well as how they may intersect) when seeking to increase equity.
- To make a difference, considerations of equity cannot be one-off or short-term. Strive to embed equity actions into all aspects of the work you do.

How do you define equity?



Panelists mentioned the importance of a shared understanding of what equity means; however, there is not a single definition of equity, particularly when used in the context of building partnerships. Some definitions include justice and fairness in the ways that people are treated. Descriptions of equity often seek to differentiate it from equality, noting that equality refers to people getting the same resources and opportunities, while equity refers to people getting the resources they need to be successful. It’s not a one-size-fits-all approach. One panelist pointed to the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation definition of equity which describes expanding opportunity as well as removing obstacles such as poverty and discrimination.

What are some potential initial action steps to help build equity into partnerships?

- Be curious and ask questions. When the answer to a question is, “Because we’ve always done it this way,” use that as an opportunity to re-evaluate.
- Review internal policies at your organization; hiring and promotion can be a good place to start.
- Consult colleagues, partners, and others with relevant experience or expertise. Do not let fear of mistakes keep you from trying equity-focused approaches. It can be uncomfortable and messy; be humble and patient in the work.

What resources can help build equity into partnerships?

- Consider minority- and women-led businesses when hiring outside vendors to partner in your work.
- When working with organizational and agency partners, ask if they have any equity policies or practices.
- When working with community members, pay them for their time and expertise just as you would with other partners. Their lived experience can make a valuable contribution to the partnership.
- Make sure that partnership opportunities, particularly with community members, allow for full participation by considering needs such as transportation and child care.

SPEAKERS

Victor Armstrong, Chief Health Equity Officer, [NC Department of Health and Human Services](#)

Dr. Iheoma Iruka, Founding Director, Research Action Coalition, Frank Porter Graham Child Development Institute and Research Professor of Public Policy, [UNC Chapel Hill](#)

Dr. Julia Mendez Smith, Professor of Psychology and Special Consultant on Equity, Inclusion and Belonging Initiatives for the Division of Student Affairs, [UNC Greensboro](#)

Dr. Vivian Tseng, Senior Vice President, Programs, [William T. Grant Foundation](#)



Click [HERE](#) to watch the full session.

Click [HERE](#) for a listing of additional resources.

The North Carolina [Office of Strategic Partnerships \(OSP\)](#) develops, launches, and enhances partnerships between state government and North Carolina’s research and philanthropic sectors.

OSP works with state government and non-governmental partners on priority issues, develops and convenes networks of public sector and research experts, and provides learning and engagement opportunities. These efforts help to deepen connections between North Carolina state government and external research experts and to increase state government’s internal capacity to generate and use evidence to improve policy and programmatic functions.



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