The NIH UNITE Initiative

- Events of the past year have brought into sharp relief the ongoing reality of racial injustice in our country, and the responsibility of all of us to address this issue
- A series of intense Institute and Center Director meeting discussions were held to identify initial issues
- Two self-assembled affinity groups at NIH (8CRE, AA/B Scientists) and the Anti-Harassment SC met with NIH leadership for candid discussions that informed next steps
- We have arrived at a shared commitment to address structural racism: we must not allow this pivotal moment to pass
The NIH UNITE Initiative

Initial Issues Identified:

▪ We must ensure that biomedical research, and the administrative system that supports it, is devoid of hostility grounded in race, sex, and other federally protected characteristics

▪ In this new initiative, we are committed to delineate elements that may perpetuate structural racism in biomedical research both within NIH and the extramural community leading to a lack of personnel inclusiveness, equity, and diversity
The NIH UNITE Initiative

Initial Issues Identified:

- All ideas must be given an equal and fair review, without regard to current dogma, precedents, or who presents the ideas
- As COVID-19 has made painfully clear, health disparities and inequities continue to contribute to morbidity and mortality in our nation, making it essential to redress the fundamental causes of these disparities/inequities and identify research programs that could identify effective interventions
The NIH UNITE Initiative

Understanding stakeholder experiences through listening and learning

New research on health disparities/minority health/health equity

Improving the NIH Culture and Structure for Equity, Inclusion, and Excellence

Transparency, communication, and accountability with our internal and external stakeholders

Extramural Research Ecosystem: Changing Policy, Culture, and Structure to Promote Workforce Diversity
Initial UNITE Recommendations

• Publicly commit to identifying and correcting any NIH policies or practices that may have helped to perpetuate structural racism
“To those individuals in the biomedical research enterprise who have endured disadvantages due to structural racism, I am truly sorry. NIH is committed to instituting new ways to support diversity, equity, and inclusion, and identifying and dismantling any policies and practices at our own agency that may harm our workforce and our science.”

— Francis S. Collins, M.D., Ph.D., NIH Director

https://www.nih.gov/ending-structural-racism
Initial UNITE Recommendations and Actions

• Publicly commit to identifying and correcting any NIH policies or practices that may have helped to perpetuate structural racism – Published 3/1/21
• Continue to aggressively implement approaches to address the “Ginther Gap” and enhance portfolio diversity
R01eq Applicants and Funding Rates Type 1 and Type 2: FY2013 and FY2020 (by Race/Ethnicity)

### Number of Applicants

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>AA/B (%)</th>
<th>Hispanic (%)</th>
<th>Total Applicants</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2013</td>
<td>1.8% AA/B</td>
<td>4.4% Hispanic</td>
<td>16,918</td>
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<tr>
<td>2020</td>
<td>2.3% AA/B</td>
<td>5.2% Hispanic</td>
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### Funding Rates

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>AA/B (%)</th>
<th>Hispanic (%)</th>
<th>Total Applicants</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2013</td>
<td>1.1% AA/B</td>
<td>3.7% Hispanic</td>
<td>17.7% 18.1%</td>
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<tr>
<td>2020</td>
<td>1.8% AA/B</td>
<td>4.8% Hispanic</td>
<td>27.5% 27.4%</td>
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Action — BRAIN FOA
First NIH FOA using Plans to Enhance Diversity Perspective as a consideration for scoring

Department of Health and Human Services

Part 1. Overview Information

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participating Organization(s)</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>National Institutes of Health (NIH)</td>
</tr>
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</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Components of Participating Organizations</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>National Institute of Mental Health (NIMH)</td>
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<tr>
<td>National Eye Institute (NEI)</td>
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<tr>
<td>National Institute on Aging (NIA)</td>
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<tr>
<td>National Institute on Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism (NIAAA)</td>
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<tr>
<td>National Institute of Biomedical Imaging and Bioengineering (NIBIB)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Eunice Kennedy Shriver National Institute of Child Health and Human Development (NICHD)</td>
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<td>National Institute on Deafness and Other Communication Disorders (NIDCD)</td>
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<td>National Institute on Drug Abuse (NIDA)</td>
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<tr>
<td>National Institute of Neurological Disorders and Stroke (NINDS)</td>
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<tr>
<td>National Center for Complementary and Integrative Health (NCCIH)</td>
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</tbody>
</table>


BRAIN Initiative: Reagent Resources for Brain Cell Type-Specific Access and Manipulation to Broaden Distribution of Enabling Technologies for Neuroscience (U24 Clinical Trial Not Allowed)
Initial UNITE Recommendations and Actions

• Publicly commit to identifying and correcting any NIH policies or practices that may have helped to perpetuate structural racism – Published 3/1/21
• Continue to aggressively implement approaches to address the “Ginther Gap” and enhance portfolio diversity - Ongoing
• Launch a multi-phased, -tiered, and -integrated Common Fund Initiative focused on transformative health disparities research initiatives to reduce health disparities/inequities
The NIH UNITE Initiative to Strengthen Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion: Together, We’re Stronger

NIH Common Fund Transformative Research to Address Health Disparities and Advance Health Equity – Committed up to $24M

Two FOAs released 3/26/21:

1) RFA-RM-21-021 Transformative Research to Address Health Disparities and Advance Health Equity (U01 Clinical Trial Allowed) - https://grants.nih.gov/grants/guide/rfa-files/RFA-RM-21-021.html

2) RFA-RM-21-022 Transformative Research to Address Health Disparities and Advance Health Equity at Minority Serving Institutions (U01 Clinical Trial Allowed) - https://grants.nih.gov/grants/guide/rfa-files/RFA-RM-21-022.html
Initial UNITE Recommendations and Actions

• Publicly commit to identifying and correcting any NIH policies or practices that may have helped to perpetuate structural racism – Published 3/1/21
• Continue to aggressively implement approaches to address the “Ginther Gap” and enhance portfolio diversity - Ongoing
• Launch a multi-phased, -tiered, and -integrated Common Fund Initiative focused on transformative health disparities research initiatives to reduce health disparities/inequities – RFAs published 3/26/21
• Ensure a robust NIH Enterprise-wide commitment to support the NIMHD FOA focused on the effects of structural racism and discrimination on health disparities/inequities; encourage funding levels that are commensurate with overall IC resources
# Action

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Funding Opportunity Title</th>
<th>Understanding and Addressing the Impact of Structural Racism and Discrimination on Minority Health and Health Disparities (R01 Clinical Trial Optional)</th>
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<tr>
<td>Activity Code</td>
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<td>Funding Opportunity Announcement (FOA) Number</td>
<td>RFA-MD-21-004</td>
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<tr>
<td>Companion Funding Opportunity</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number of Applications</td>
<td>See Section III. 3. Additional Information on Eligibility.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

With the commitment of up to $30.8 M by 25 ICOs:
- Letters of intent due 7/20/21
- Applications due 8/24/21

Initial UNITE Recommendations

- Publicly commit to identifying and correcting any NIH policies or practices that may have helped to perpetuate structural racism – *Published 3/1/21*
- Continue to aggressively implement approaches to address the “Ginther Gap” and enhance portfolio diversity - *Ongoing*
- Launch a multi-phased, -tiered, and -integrated Common Fund Initiative focused on transformative health disparities research initiatives to reduce health disparities/inequities – *RFAs published 3/26/21*
- Ensure a robust NIH Enterprise-wide commitment to support the NIMHD FOA focused on the effects of structural racism and discrimination on health disparities/inequities; encourage funding levels that are commensurate with overall IC resources – *RFA published 3/23/21 with 25 ICOs*
- Develop a sustainable process to systematically gather and make public the demographics of our internal and external workforce
The NIH UNITE Initiative to Strengthen Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion: Together, We’re Stronger

Action – NIH Internal Data FY 21, Q2

https://www.edi.nih.gov/people/resources/advancing-racial-equity/nih-workforce-profile-fy21q02
Initial UNITE Recommendations

• Implement policy changes that promote anti-racism and remove barriers to professional growth for staff from diverse backgrounds, including underrepresented groups
Action

Anti-Racism Steering Committee

ARSC Membership

• 470+ members from across NIH – all race/ethnicities, job categorizations, and pay levels

Goal

• To redress issues regarding policies and procedures that lead to wrongs
• Does not address individual cases

NIHANTIR-STEERINGCMTE@mail.nih.gov
ARSC Demographic Data from EDI

- 471 members of the NIH Racism Steering Committee.
- The pay plan breakout is as follows: GS = 370, GP =7, AD = 1, CC = 3, ES = 4, RF = 21, RG = 22, 1 Unknown.
- Grade distribution is provided for the GS pay plan only.
- Demographics for all Fellows and Contractors (n=42) are unknown.
- Demographics for 3 FTEs is unknown (3 race, 1 disability and 1 sex).
- To maintain confidentiality and protect individual identification from deductive disclosure risk, some categories are suppressed for reporting purposes.
Initial UNITE Recommendations and Actions

• Implement policy changes that promote anti-racism and remove barriers to professional growth for staff from diverse backgrounds, including underrepresented groups - *Initiated*

• *Develop a performance expectation for IC Directors to be accountable for equity, diversity, and inclusion efforts and actively participate in NIH-wide diversity efforts through a diversity, equity, and inclusion officer or other means appropriate for the IC, in coordination with SWD and EDI.*

• Expand the Distinguished Scholars Program to Senior Investigators hired with tenure and enhance recruitment of researchers from underrepresented groups as candidates for open IRP investigator positions - *Initiated*
UNITE Recommendations and Actions Going Forward
E Committee Charge

To perform a broad systematic evaluation of NIH extramural policies and processes to identify and change practices and structures that perpetuate a lack of inclusivity and diversity within the extramural research ecosystem

Includes developing strategies to address funding disparities and increase applications that would support individuals from under-represented groups
Build and Sustain Research Capacity to Enable Fuller Participation in Modern Research Enterprise

• **Progress, Accomplishments**  
  - Actively engaging with internal/external stakeholders to understand issues impacting MSIs

• **Next Steps (Summer 2021- Early 2022)**  
  - Develop more comprehensive communications/outreach strategies (e.g., toolkits, webinars, workshops, “SPAD/SuRE-like” academies, institutional/leadership “think tanks”, etc.)  
  - Strategize initiatives/funding models addressing construction, infrastructure, endowment needs, small business/contracting opportunities and non-traditional partnerships

• **Metric(s) of Success**  
  - Sustained increases in #s of applications and awards to HBCUs, TCUs, other MSIs; more engaged communication between NIH and MSIs
E Committee: Priorities

Identify NIH Processes and Policies Contributing to Inequities in Extramural Funding

• Progress, Accomplishments
  - Meeting with subject matter experts in NIH peer review, extramural funding opportunity/concept development, and extramural staff training

• Next Steps (Summer/Fall 2021)
  - Listening sessions w/ NIH POs/SROs & review UNITE RFI responses
  - Generate proposal of new programs and policy recommendations

• Metric(s) of Success
  - Successful implementation of evidence-based interventions and programs to address inequities and biases in NIH processes and polices
  - Centralized repository containing themes from listening sessions available to all UNITE members
E Committee: Priorities

Extramural Institutional Culture: Develop and Launch Programs to Spur Institutional Culture Change in Support of Inclusivity and Equity

• Progress, Accomplishments
  Developing proposals for new programs to assist extramural institutions to:
  - Conduct institutional climate surveys and self studies using validated instruments
  - Test innovative interventions to improve institutional culture

• Next Steps (Summer 2021)
  - Draft outline of programs and receive internal feedback
  - Identify sources of funding

• Metric(s) of Success
  - BUILD Hallmarks of Institutional Culture Change
E Committee: Priorities

Increasing Career Opportunities for URGs

• Progress, Accomplishments
  Exploring strategies to:
  - Scale up existing NIH programs that increase and foster career opportunities for URGs
  - Increase awareness of funding opportunities for URGs

• Next Steps (Summer/Fall 2021)
  - Garner IC support to expand Science Education Partnership Awards (SEPA) participation/funding
  - Encourage inclusion of data science focus within SEPA
  - Assess strategies to target communications to URGs

• Metric(s) of Success
  - Sustained increased number of SEPA awards, URG-supported research experiences, and training and career development awards
UNITE Actions/Priorities Going Forward – Next 6 Months

• To facilitate HD/MH/HE research, the President’s budget has proposed increased funding for NIMHD, NINR, NHLBI, and FIC
• Continue to listen and learn from a wide variety of stakeholders, including those who are not frequently engaged
• Develop actionable data dashboards that track and provide visualizations of intramural workforce and NIH HD/MH/HE research investments with key performance indicators and metrics
• Additional FOAs that focus on IC-specific disease/topic areas related to HD/MH/HE
• Develop programs to spur institutional culture change in support of inclusivity and equity
UNITE Actions/Priorities Going Forward – Next 6 Months

- Increase URG career opportunities, starting with increasing IC participation in Science Education Partnership Award (SEPA) – targeting K – 12 STEM education
- Examine NIH staff (e.g., PO, SRO) interactions with applicants (e.g., URG applicants) to address bias or inequities that may impact funding opportunities
- Develop programs to expand NIH interactions with and support of HBCUs, TCUs and other MSIs
- Change physical and virtual representations at NIH to more accurately reflect the diversity of our society
- Publish revised NIH internal guidance for reporting racial discrimination
Injustice anywhere is a threat to justice everywhere

Martin Luther King, Jr
Commentary

Affirming NIH’s commitment to addressing structural racism in the biomedical research enterprise

Francis S. Collins,1,* Amy Bany Adams,2 Courtney Aklin,3 Trevor K. Archer,4 Marie A. Bernard,5,6 Ericka Boone,7 John Burklow,8 Michele K. Evans,6 Sadhana Jackson,2,9 Alfred C. Johnson,10 Jon Lorsch,11 Mia Rochelle Lowden,12 Anna María Nápoles,13 Anna E. Ordóñez,14 Robert Rivers,15 Victoria Rucker,5,16 Tara Schwetz,3 Julia A. Segre,17 Lawrence A. Tabak,9 Monica Webb Hooper,13 Carrie Wolinetz,3 and NIH UNITE

DOI: 10.1016/j.cell.2021.05.014 (2021).
# The NIH UNITE Initiative

## UNITE Co-Chairs
- **Marie A. Bernard**, NIH Office of the Director/Office of Scientific Workforce Diversity
- **Alfred Johnson**, NIH Office of the Director/Office of Management
- **Lawrence Tabak**, NIH Office of the Director

## UNITE Program Manager
- **Victoria Rucker**, Center for Information Technology/NIH Office of the Director

## UNITE Program Support
- **Jordan Gladman**, NIH Office of the Director
- **Marzjah Esther**, NIH Office of the Director

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- **Robert Rivers** (NIDDK)
- **Gwen Bishop** (NIDCD)
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- **Juanita Chinn** (NICHD)
- **Janine Clayton** (ORWH/OD)
- **Kathy Etz** (NIDA)
- **Justin Hentges** (AoU/OD)
- **Daryl Holder** (CC)
- **Samantha Jonson** (NCATS)
- **Joan Romaine** (NIAAA)
- **Asha Storm** (NIBIB)
- **Shannon Zenk** (NINR)
- **Marzjah Esther** (OD)

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- **Alfred Johnson** (OM/OD)
- **Talin Barnes** (NIEHS)
- **Gwn Collins** (NCI)
- **Charles Egwuagu** (NEI)
- **Courtney Fitzhugh** (NHLBI)
- **Kenneth Gibbs** (NIGMS)
- **Bernard Harper** (CC)
- **Kendall Hill** (CSR)
- **Camille Hoover** (NIDDK)
- **Shawn Lewis** (NINR)
- **Marguerite Matthews** (NINDS)
- **Shaun Sims** (NIBIB)
- **Melissa Espinoza** (NIA)

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- **Sadhana Jackson** (NINDS, NCI)
- **Mohammed Ayegbo** (NAID)
- **Albert Avila** (NIDA)
- **Samantha Calabrese** (NICH)
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- **Eric Sid** (NCATS)
- **Wayne Wang** (NHBI)
- **Cassie Williams** (NIAAA)
- **James Washington** (NINDS)
- **Maryam Zaringhalam** (NLM)

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- **Rena D’Souza** (NIDCR)
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- **Patricia Jones** (NIA)
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- **Vanessa Marshall** (NIMHD)
- **Kamilah Rashid** (IMOD/OD)
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