



**NATIONAL 4-H
COUNCIL**

True Leaders in Equity Institute

Virtual Convening

September 10–12, 2021, and October 9, 2021

TRUE LEADERS IN EQUITY INSTITUTE: AN OVERVIEW

4-H believes in youth and adults working in partnership to leverage the unique strengths that each brings to their communities and world. The True Leaders in Equity Institute (TLEI) is an annual, 3-day, intensive summit that equips 4-H youth–adult pairs to be change agents within the Cooperative Extension System and 4-H. As in 2020, TLEI 2021 took place via synchronous virtual sessions on two weekends in September and October.

Through the TLEI, 4-H will empower up to 20 youth–adult mentor teams (comprising two youth, one extension staff person, and one adult mentor) from 4-H programs across the country to become more effective change agents and equity leaders in their communities. This virtual training and leadership opportunity paves the way for participants to work together to conceive, plan, and implement a project that tackles an equity-related challenge or issue.

These efforts are particularly focused on increasing equity among nine marginalized groups of people and four affinity groups (children and youth with disabilities, disconnected youth, immigrant youth, incarcerated youth, mental health and well-being, underrepresented youth, youth experiencing homelessness, youth in foster care, LGBTQ+, African American, Latinx, Asian American/Pacific Islander, and Native American).

Participants in the Institute are aged 15 or older with a desire to champion equity in their communities and a passion for creating a sense of belonging through 4-H, Well-Connected Communities, SNAP-ED volunteering, National Mentoring Project volunteering, or other Cooperative Extension System programs.

Goals and Outcomes

It is anticipated that the TLEI participants will achieve the following:

- Gain a deeper understanding of key principles and concepts related to equity and inclusion.
- Identify an equity indicator or issue to focus on for the next year.
- Develop skills and competencies in equity leadership and make connections to people, organizations, and tools that can help them implement their projects.
- Create an overall framework for their 1-year project and a specific 90-day action plan for implementation in their communities.

The TLEI aims to produce a well-trained cadre of youth who function as ambassadors and leaders within a growing network of change agents in the 4-H system. The TLEI will also produce concrete, high-impact, and replicable examples of how young people used their voices and acted to address issues of equity and inclusion in their communities.

Preconference Engagement

Each participant received an Equity Box in advance of the TLEI live sessions. The box contained small gifts, candy, and T-shirts and were intended to promote engagement, purpose, and a sense of belonging among all participants and the team of event organizers. Participants also

worked within their state teams, with the support of adult partners, to define and research an equity project that they have an interest in implementing.

Participants

TLEI 2021 hosted 16 teams drawn from 14 states. See the [appendix](#) for short descriptions of each team's proposed equity projects.

Day One

INTRODUCTION

Welcome*

Dorothy Freeman, Ph.D., Director of Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion, National 4-H Council

Dr. Freeman kicked off the weekend by formally welcoming the participants to 4-H's third TLEI. The goal of the Institute was to equip and empower 4-H teams from across the country to become equity leaders in their communities. Dr. Freeman hoped the Institute would give the participants more knowledge, skills, and relationships to help them become more effective change agents within the 4-H system and their communities.

Dr. Freeman introduced the planning and design team members from 4-H and encouraged participants to post on social media about the TLEI using the hashtags #TrueLeaders and #TLEI2021 while they are working on their projects. She thanked the funders who made the TLEI possible: the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation and the W. K. Kellogg Foundation.

Inclusion Is 4-H's Top Priority

Jennifer Sirangelo, President and CEO, National 4-H Council

Ms. Sirangelo said her position allows her opportunities to talk with government, industry, and academic leaders across the country about the future of 4-H and where the organization should expend its energy. The message has come across loud and clear that increasing inclusion and creating opportunity for all youth is 4-H's top priority. Therefore, 4-H enthusiastically supports plans by TLEI participants to expand diversity, equity, and inclusion. Ms. Sirangelo hoped that participants would take advantage of the chance to learn from experts and to meet peers as they design their projects. She thanked all those who made the TLEI possible.

Understanding Ourselves to Understand Others

Dionardo Pizaña, Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Specialist, Michigan State University Extension

Mr. Pizaña observed that equity work starts from within. Understanding your own experience and frame of reference is an important step toward building relationships, which is essential for creating equity. Breaking out into small groups, participants talked about what they see as their individual gifts and areas for growth. Mr. Pizaña shared that his gift is the passion he brings to his work around equity and justice in community settings. His area of growth is learning and relearning new concepts about gender and gender identity, which he hopes to do with compassion. Participants shared their responses in the chat box, some of which are captured here:

* Process note: As participants joined, Ron Fairchild, president and CEO of the Smarter Learning Group and a member of the planning committee for the event, spoke up periodically to welcome them and let them know when the convening would get underway. In the meantime, participants were invited to introduce themselves via the chat box. This process served several purposes: participants could 1) verify that their audio and video components were working and that they could use the chat feature; 2) learn who else was on the line; 3) exchange messages via chat to get to know each other, much like they would have at the opening reception of an in-person convention.

Gifts	Areas of Growth
• Curiosity	• Patience
• Compassion	• Time management
• Connecting	• Communicating through differences
• Dedication	• Understanding my implicit biases
• Perseverance	• Listening
• Creativity	• Expressing my opinion
• Empathy	• Awareness of my privilege

Mr. Pizaña said that individual growth requires intention. Similarly, the path away from injustice is embracing intention, which includes recognizing who is missing from the conversation. The room is full of gifts but also with areas of growth, he observed.

Participants were asked to offer their perceptions of what is meant by “culture,” and responses included thoughts and ideas, seen and unseen behavior, customs and norms, traditions, and everything that influences a person’s beliefs and values. As a way to think about how to expand the definition of culture—without losing aspects that are important to individuals, such as race, ethnicity, gender, and gender identity—Mr. Pizaña asked participants to think about the cultural connections around their names (first, last, or nickname). He explained that when he entered parochial school, the principal decided he would be called “Don” rather than Dionardo. At age 19, he finally reclaimed his given name. Now, as an adult, he feels better able to navigate the fact that some people in his hometown still call him “Don.” Names can be a window into experience. In small group discussions, participants talked about the cultural connections around their names.[†]

Mr. Pizaña pointed out that meeting someone with an unfamiliar name is an opportunity to practice humility and try to do what is right, not just what is familiar or convenient. For example, if you have trouble understanding the name, ask the person to repeat it slowly; if you mispronounce the name, ask for forgiveness and make it clear that you will try to do better. Our names are unique, and when they are shortened, mispronounced, or dismissed, we might feel cut off from our humanity.

Teams working toward equity should strive to build a common language, so that they have a shared understanding of their work and goals. Mr. Pizaña put forth some definitions of diversity, equity, and inclusion for participants to consider (borrowed from Nia Imani Fields, Ph.D.):

[†] Process note: During debriefing, it was suggested that organizers emphasize in advance to youth and adult participants that talking about equity and inclusion can sometimes lead to difficult and uncomfortable conversations. Participants should be prepared for some discomfort, and organizers and facilitators should be prepared to manage conversations appropriately.

Diversity: Our different identities, such as age, race, ethnicity, socioeconomic status, physical and mental ability, gender, sexual orientation, spiritual orientation, spiritual practices, employment status, geographic location, and other characteristics.

Equity: When a person or group receives the unique resources and opportunities needed to reduce or eliminate the barriers.

Inclusion: Moves beyond simply having diversity within a space and toward creating an equitable environment where the richness of ideas, backgrounds, and perspectives are harnessed. Inclusion is the act of creating a space where each person is authentically valued, respected, and supported.

Mr. Pizaña pointed out that in some cases, lack of access to information and resources can be a barrier to equity. In small groups, participants briefly discussed how their equity projects could promote diversity, equity, or inclusion. In closing, Mr. Pizaña thanked participants for their willingness to share their thoughts and to be vulnerable with one another.

FEATURED SPEAKERS

Working Together for Change

Mayyadah Zagelow, 2021 4-H Youth in Action Pillar Awardee for Healthy Living

Ms. Zagelow was among the first cohort to take part in the TLEI, and she expressed that 4-H had a significant impact on her. Through 4-H, she found her voice and began to speak out against bullying and marginalization, advocating for racial equity and for LGBTQ+ youth in 4-H programs. She launched a group that eventually became the Washington State 4-H Teen Equity and Inclusion Task Force, which is developing best practices for creating equitable organizations and facilitating dialogue around access and opportunity in 4-H. Ms. Zagelow highlighted the need for diversity within the task force membership and for fostering safe spaces for difficult discussions and active listening. What might feel like a small interaction can have an outsized impact, particularly for someone who experiences validation for the first time.

Ms. Zagelow advised the participants to expect to face challenges in their work. Striving for equity can be emotionally taxing. Some participants will be processing their own trauma, discrimination, and discomfort as their projects elicit stories about the struggles that others face. Ms. Zagelow urged the participants to be aware of such feelings when they arise, practice self-care, seek out mental health resources, and lean on people who can help.

Through the TLEI equity projects, participants can provide a place of belonging. Ms. Zagelow reminded the participants that collectively, they have what it takes to implement changes that will make the world better. “4-H changed my life,” she noted, and she hoped to create a safe and inclusive environment for others to have a similar experience. “Let’s work together to create change,” she concluded.

Let’s work together to create change.

Moving Beyond Words

Nia Imani Fields, Ph.D., Maryland 4-H Program Leader, Assistant Director of Maryland Extension
Dr. Fields emphasized the need to move beyond words and into action. To ensure a shared understanding among all the participants, she offered definitions of several key terms (see graphic on the following page).

Going further, Dr. Fields described “robust equity:”

The intentional counter to inequality, institutionalized privilege and prejudice, and systemic deficits and the intentional promotion of thriving across multiple domains for those who experience inequity and injustice.

This definition points out that inequity is not accidental and combating inequity requires action to dismantle the causes. Most inequity is institutionalized and has been for generations, so much so that even those with good intentions can perpetuate it. Through critical reflection of our words and actions, we can begin to counter inequity and promote thriving.

Dr. Fields said 4-H strives to be open to all and to foster a sense of belonging. She asked participants to reflect on what actions are needed to achieve that goal. Respondents suggested the following via chat:

- Make 4-H more accessible to youth from low socioeconomic backgrounds by waiving dues.
- Open up more programs to people with disabilities.
- Better promote 4-H so that more people know what it has to offer.
- Develop and share 4-H materials in the language used by the community.

To work toward meaningful and sustainable change, we must dive deep into the root causes of problems like racism, sexism, and homophobia—even though some may consider these subjects taboo or claim they are too heavy for youth in 4-H programs to address. As an example, Dr. Fields described some of the legacies and norms that persist in 4-H, noting that the program remained segregated until the Civil Rights Act was passed in 1964. The program retains some traditions that were culturally appropriated from indigenous communities. While 4-H leaders at the national level express their commitment to equity, they must work to hold themselves accountable and allow those working throughout the program to speak up and change the norms. Referring to the iceberg analogy, Dr. Fields stressed the need to align the stated goals (above the surface) with the everyday work (below the surface).

<p>Diversity</p> <p>Our different identities such as age, race, ethnicity, socio-economic status, physical and mental ability, gender, sexual orientation, spiritual practices, employment status, geographic location and other characteristics.</p>	<p>Inclusion</p> <p>Moves beyond simply having diversity within a space and toward creating an equitable environment where the richness of ideas, backgrounds, and perspectives are harnessed. Inclusion is the act of creating a space where each person is authentically valued, respected and supported.</p>	<p>Culture</p> <p>The shared experiences of people, including their languages, values, customs and worldviews.</p>
<p>Equity</p> <p>When a person or group receives the unique resources and opportunities needed to reduce or eliminate the barriers.</p>	<p>Culturally Relevant Teaching</p> <p>Teaching practices that use the cultural knowledge, viewpoints, and social conditions of our participants to make our programs more relevant.</p>	<p>Stereotype</p> <p>Generalized beliefs and expectations about members of certain groups that often lead to judgement without cause.</p>
<p>Implicit Bias</p> <p>The attitudes or stereotypes that affect our understanding, actions, and decisions in an unconscious manner.</p>	<p>Oppression</p> <p>The discrimination of one social group for the benefit of another.</p>	<p>Social Justice</p> <p>The act of distributing power, resources, opportunity, societal benefits and protection in a way that is equitable for all members of society.</p>



To achieve robust equity in 4-H programs, Dr. Fields advised the following:

- Make all programs youth-centered and culturally relevant.
- Use language that clearly describes what is meant (e.g., using the term “antiracist”).
- Commit to continuous critical reflection.
- Understand systemic barriers (in 4-H and throughout society) and work to counter them intentionally.

- Expand networks to increase influence.
- Challenge the status quo and dream big.
- Be bold and disruptive.

Dr. Fields quoted 4-H participant Kalani Washington of Georgia, who stated, “Now that there is growing momentum around the social justice movement and making real, positive change for our country, it’s my responsibility and others of my generation to make sure the conversation continues and that there’s real action.”

REFLECTIONS ON DAY ONE

- Appreciated learning about robust equity.
- Take action; equity has to be more than words.
- There is always work to be done.
- Let youth lead; amplify youth voices.
- Youth are capable of understanding and engaging in these conversations and the work.
- Intention is key to making change.
- Be bold, brave, and courageous; don’t be complacent.
- Know your identity and claim it.
- Don’t be afraid to use your voice.
- Walk the walk, don’t just talk the talk.
- Value others’ differences and be true to your own opinions.
- Be persistent and engaged.
- Don’t put up barriers; include everyone.
- Speak up and speak out.

Challenge the status quo and dream big.

Day Two

WELCOME

Memorable Moments

Asked to comment on memorable moments from day one, Neva Mehrotra of Iowa felt that adding “robust” to “equity” gave the term a whole new meaning; she said she hoped to work on expanding her vocabulary to better reflect the action required, as is demonstrated by terms such as “antiracism.” Katrina Bohlin of Indiana observed that the TLEI is an opportunity to help make 4-H a place for everyone.

Ron Fairchild, TLEI organizer and facilitator, expressed that talking about the root causes of inequity can be challenging. He offered some concepts that participants could use to facilitate courageous conversations:

- Stay engaged; be fully present.
- Be prepared to experience discomfort and be open to it.
- Speak your truth, acknowledging your individual perspective.
- Expect and accept nonclosure.

Breathing Life Into Dreams

Oronde A. Miller, Program Officer for Racial Equity, W. K. Kellogg Foundation

Mr. Miller pointed out that we live in challenging and unpredictable times—but such conditions also give rise to energy that unlocks the potential for real transformation. The W. K. Kellogg Foundation celebrates the work that 4-H participants are doing to bring about transformation. Mr. Miller hoped the foundation’s support would breathe life into the genius and dreams of young people.

4-H is taking courageous steps at an important moment in history to address the long legacy of race and racism. The work is not easy, but the Kellogg Foundation is grateful for the opportunity to support 4-H in it. Mr. Miller said his team is devoted to funding work around racial equity, healing, and leadership development. The team recognizes the need to fix disparities at the systemic, institutional, and even individual level. Moreover, the team believes that communities know what they need to heal—in part because they have experienced how the health effects of disparities are transmitted across generations. Finally, the team appreciates the importance of leadership, including informal leadership demonstrated by those without formal training or status. Mr. Miller said he and his colleagues look forward to learning more from the participants as they continue their journeys to achieve equity.

GALLERY VISIT

Mr. Fairchild explained that participants would break up into smaller groups where teams would present their proposed projects for feedback. (See the [appendix](#) for summaries of all the projects.) He said the notion of a gallery brought to mind his visit to the Civil Rights Institute in Birmingham, AL. An exhibit there about the Freedom Riders—young people who campaigned for voting rights for Black people in Alabama in the face of violent opposition—reminded him that young people have always been at the forefront of efforts to improve social justice. Mr. Fairchild encouraged participants to be courageous and speak their truths as they developed

their projects. He also urged them to tap into their available resources—such as mentors, friends, and colleagues—to help shape their projects and move them forward.

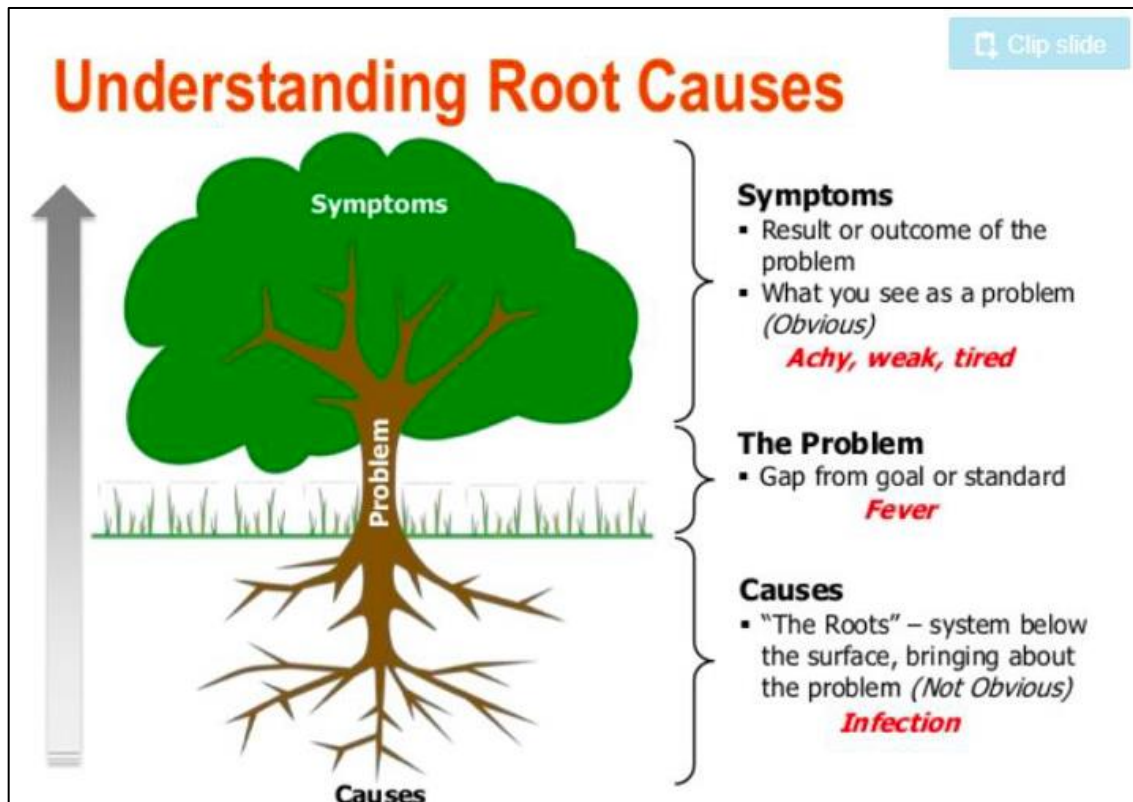
Takeaways from the Gallery Visit

Mr. Fairchild said that many in his group demonstrated a clear focus on the barriers their projects sought to challenge. Many used data to draw attention to the reality of those barriers. Several discussed partnerships with the community and sought ideas on how to get more people excited about joining in their projects. Participants also discussed the importance of staying committed to their values, beliefs, and mission yet being flexible in their approach as circumstances changed.

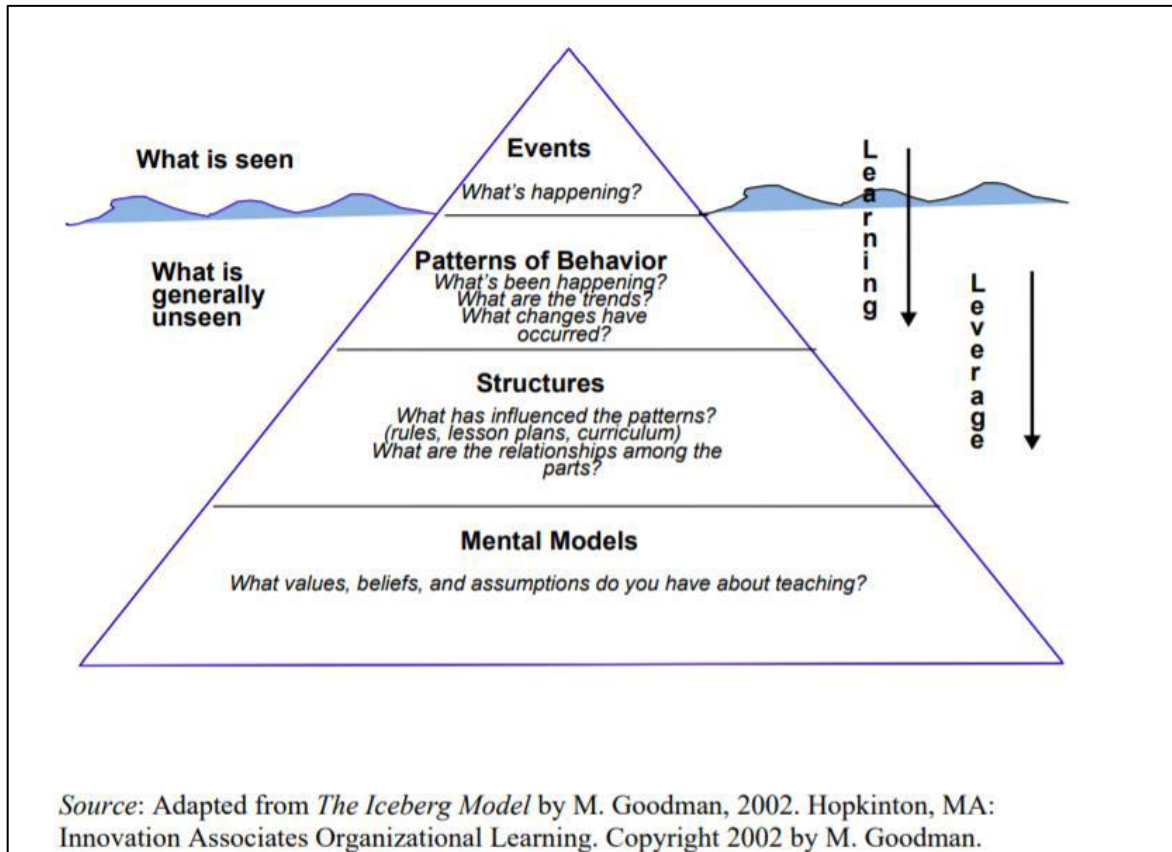
Shaq Sanchez of New Jersey said several projects described in his group focused on including students with physical and developmental disabilities, which has the effect of bringing new people into 4-H and reaching more deeply into communities that the program already serves. Laura Wyatt of Minnesota appreciated the power of crowdsourcing. She added that participants in her group quickly became comfortable sharing their thoughts.

TOOLS FOR THINKING ABOUT EQUITY AND ACCOUNTABILITY

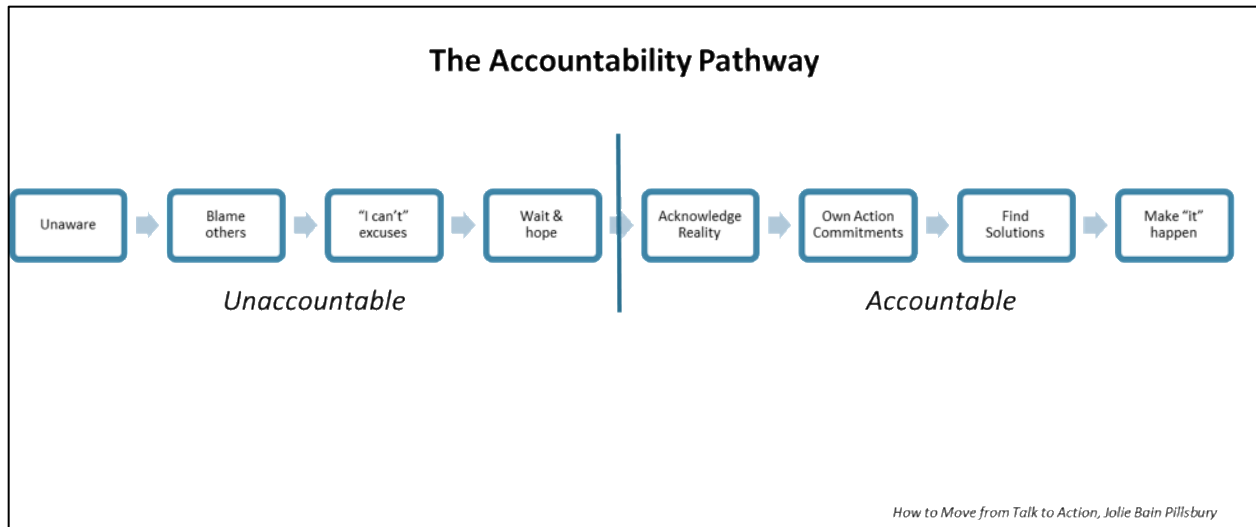
Mr. Fairchild presented some graphics to help participants frame their thinking about the root causes of inequity and how to move toward a mindset of accountability.



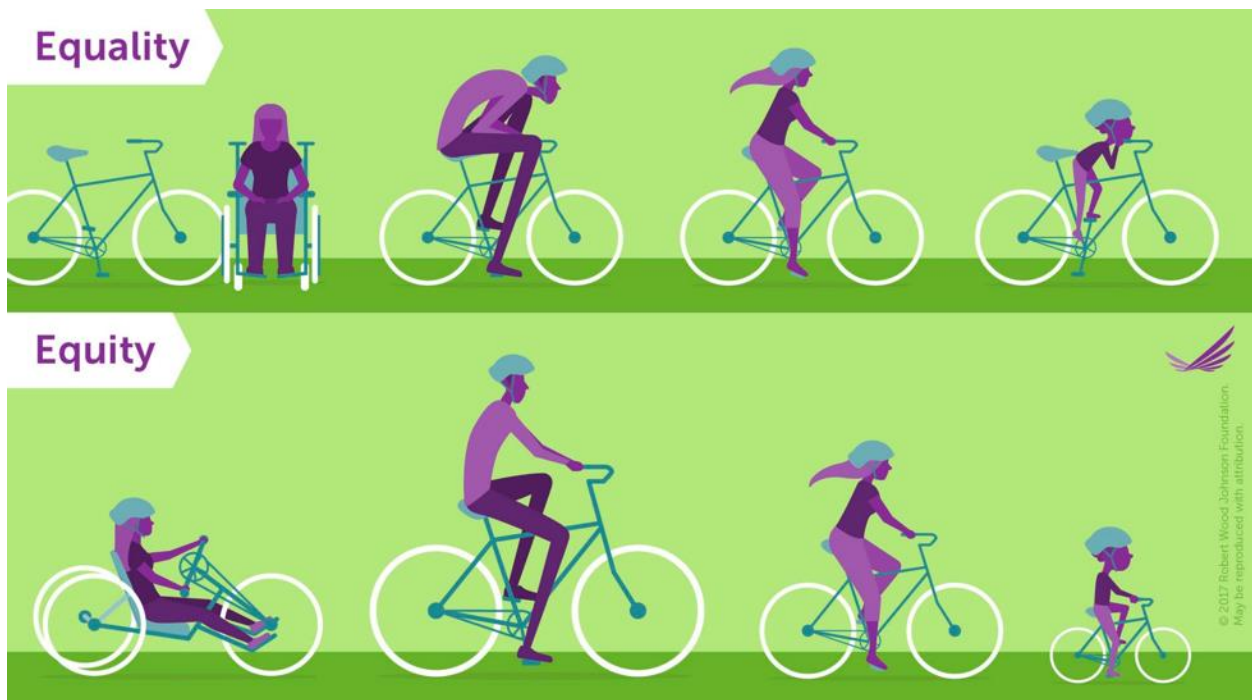
The iceberg model encourages looking at the structures, beliefs, and assumptions that undergird events we see every day.



The accountability pathway depicts how change happens by mapping out on a spectrum each step from unawareness to being the person who makes change happen. Mr. Fairchild hoped that participants' projects would help more people move to the right on the spectrum by raising awareness, taking ownership of actions and making commitments, finding solutions, and bringing about change.



The difference between equality and equity can be quickly conveyed by a graphic that shows that one size does not fit all. Equity means ensuring people have what they need to thrive, which can mean customizing efforts to meet the needs, interests, motivations, and desires of the individual.



HIGH-IMPACT STORYTELLING

Ann Christiano, Frank Karel Chair in Public Interest Communications and Director of the Center for Public Interest Communications, University of Florida

Ms. Christiano emphasized that storytelling is a powerful communication tool. Good stories make new ideas feel familiar—for example, giving shape to an abstract idea. They can also make the familiar feel new—for example, by bringing a contemporary perspective to historic events.

Ms. Christiano described seven principles about what makes compelling, inspiring stories—constructed with insights from experts in journalism and behavioral, cognitive, and social science. Throughout the presentation, participants briefly broke out into small groups to discuss these principles.[‡]

Structure

All stories include a beginning, middle, and end. They usually follow a pattern of exposition, followed by action, a climax or a plot twist, then resolution. Every story incorporates one or more of seven basic plots:

- Overcoming a monster, e.g., defeating a common enemy
- Rags to riches
- Quest
- Voyage to an unfamiliar land
- Comedy, defined as a series of ridiculous events that eventually result in a happy ending
- Tragedy, defined as the emergence of a fatal flaw that leads to downfall
- Rebirth

Businesses and other ventures seeking support often rely on six essential stories:

- How we started
- Our people
- Why we do what we do
- What we learned from defeat/failure
- How we overcame failure (or plan to) to succeed
- How the world will be different when we succeed

Emotion

Stories that seek to exploit fear and sadness can have unintentional results, such as making the audience feel disenfranchised or more vulnerable to misinformation. Empathy is key to leveraging the power of emotion in storytelling with intention. Anger can motivate collective action. Other emotions that draw strong reactions are parental love, pride, awe, and hope.

[‡] Process note: During debriefing, it was suggested that organizers be prepared to get the conversation started in the short breakout sessions, because participants were slow to respond.

Dominant and Counter Narratives

Identifying pervasive, harmful, dominant narratives allows a storyteller to develop a counter narrative, also known as “flipping the script.” Dominant narratives can focus on negative perceptions or rely too heavily on a single story, excluding other information. Stories about overcoming barriers can reinforce a perception that individuals are solely responsible for their circumstances, without regard for the systems that shape them. Replacing harmful, dominant narratives with counter narratives can help advance a more positive message.

Deceptive Cadence

This refers to the idea that the audience anticipates what is coming next, because the pattern is familiar. Stories with a surprise twist draw attention and are more widely shared than predictable stories. Our brains pay attention to anything that deviates from expected patterns.

Verisimilitude

Effective stories radiate authenticity. They come from people with lived experience and those who are most affected by a given situation. Storytellers should avoid defining individuals by a single experience. The subjects of the story should have agency—that is, they should have a say in how their stories are used. People bring unique moral values to their listening. Stories can be framed according to the moral values of the intended audience.

Narrative Transportation

Stories transport the audience to a different setting, perhaps allowing individuals to see the world from a different perspective. Individuals identify with or connect with characters—and the characters do not necessarily have to “look like” the individuals in the audience. When narrative transportation is effective, the audience believes the story and does not feel the need to question the facts of the story. Vivid imagery is a key component of strong storytelling.

Empty Space

Effective stories create room for the audience to engage. Stories may omit some aspects, which can allow for a surprise later in the story or provide the audience an opportunity to fill in the missing details. On the other hand, the storyteller can fill empty space with rich information that counters an audience’s ingrained biases and harmful, dominant narratives.

In closing, Ms. Christiano recommended [The Bigger Picture: The Longest Mile](#), a video poem by Tassiana Willis that incorporates all seven principles of effective storytelling. She encouraged participants to think through how to use the principles in communicating about their 4-H projects. Via chat, participants shared some takeaways:

- How you tell your story is important.
- If you want action, you have to counter the predominant narrative and tell your story in a way that sticks.
- Emotions play a huge part in storytelling and in our equity work.

Good stories make new ideas feel familiar and make the familiar feel new.

DELVING INTO IMPLICIT BIAS

Jenny Atkinson, Senior Consultant, Smarter Learning Group

Ms. Atkinson invited participants to visualize a series of scenarios, then asked them to reflect on the characteristics of the people they envisioned. In most cases, people will picture others who look like them and/or fit into the most mainstream categories. This common reaction is an example of implicit bias.

A short video, "[Implicit Bias: Peanut Butter, Jelly, and Racism](#)," from a public television series, explained that implicit bias is an ordinary mental function that people use as a shortcut. It is informed by the media you consume, your family's beliefs, and your education over a lifetime. Implicit bias relies on automatic assumptions—such as the way that the words "peanut butter" almost always bring to mind "jelly." One example of where implicit bias comes from can be seen in the media, in which Black men are overrepresented in association with violent crime. "Blindspot bias" is recognizing bias in others but not in oneself.

Another video from the same series, "[Check Our Bias to Wreck Our Bias](#)," described an experiment to reveal the unconscious choices people make that influence their behavior. It recommended that individuals examine whatever data set they have about themselves, such as their friend groups, to look for patterns and evaluate their own biases.

Ms. Atkinson described her own experience, noting, for example, that her Colombian husband frequently reminds her that "America" can refer to the United States of America, North America, or South America. When she is with her husband, she sometimes finds herself among people who are all speaking Spanish, which helps her empathize with people in the United States who do not speak English. Ms. Atkinson said she attends one group civic function in which everyone speaks Spanish, but since she arrived, they all translate into English for her—which gives her insight into the privilege that she bears. When we recognize our privilege, we can share it with others, Ms. Atkinson noted. And when we recognize our implicit biases, we can work to challenge them and help others do the same.

Participants were asked to choose one of the implicit bias tests offered by [Project Implicit](#) and reflect on the results before the next day's meeting. Ms. Atkinson cautioned that the tests are not exact but are interesting and helpful for thinking about the different kinds of bias.

INSTANT POLL RESULTS

- The gallery visit gave me more ideas about how I am going to do my project. 95%
- I learned more about equity during today's presentations and discussions. 97%
- Hearing about other teams' projects and listening to presentations has inspired me and made me feel part of the greater 4-H equity work. 97%

Day Three

UNDERSTANDING OUR IMPLICIT BIASES

Facilitated Discussions with the Virginia 4-H Equity and Inclusion Task Force

Becca Berglie and Alexa Mitchell, Co-Founders

The Virginia 4-H Equity and Inclusion Task Force formed in May 2021 with the goal of designing and implementing solutions to promote equity for all in 4-H. After describing some ground rules for open and respectful discussion, Ms. Berglie and Ms. Mitchell—accompanied by five other youth leaders from the task force and three adult advisors—facilitated small group discussions about implicit bias with TLEI participants (who met in youth-only and adult-only breakout groups).

IN THE CHAT BOX

When is candy more than candy? How does the Airheads Extreme candy you received in your Equity Box represent diversity, equity, and inclusion?

- The box reminds me of the LGBTQ+ Pride flag.
- There are all different colors of candy, and they are all great.
- The different colors working together make the rainbow taste better.
- Every color is represented.

Following the breakout session, participants shared some ideas on how to incorporate what they learned about implicit bias into their lives:

- By challenging my bias, I can be open to new experiences.
- Ask myself, “Is this feeling or instinct correct?”
- I will step out of my comfort zone.
- I can be aware of my own bias.
- I can bring these ideas into the various youth leadership groups I work with.
- We should be conscious of our implicit biases and not be afraid of them but rather be willing to understand and work on them.

Nehal Bajaj of New Jersey described discussion about how it is difficult to make changes around how other people identify. Admitting you are wrong is hard to do, but you can start to be more conscious. Just identifying that you have bias is a big step.

Jason Estep of Georgia admitted that he and his adult peers who took the implicit bias tests online felt confused, disappointed, or guilty about the results. It helped to acknowledge that some patterns of thinking are absorbed from the media or culture but do not necessarily reflect one's true self. Mr. Estep said he realized that it is important to recognize our biases so we can slow down and allow our authentic values to guide us. Acknowledging our biases can be a tool for being the best version of oneself.

RESOURCES

Implicit Bias

- PBS Learning Media: [Who, Me? Biased?: Understanding Implicit Bias](#) (interactive lesson)
- Duke University Teachers Workshop: [Overcoming Implicit Bias](#) (blog post for educators)
- Safe Places for the Advancement of Community & Equity: [8 Strategies to Reduce/Interrupt Implicit Bias](#) (tip sheet)

Mental Health

- The [National Suicide Prevention Lifeline](#): 1-800-273-8255
- [The Trevor Project](#)
- [StopBullying.gov](#)
- [Active Minds](#)

Virginia 4-H Equity and Inclusion Task Force

- Email: va4hequity@gmail.com
- Twitter: [@va4hequity](#)
- Web: va4hequity.com

Anindita Das from Iowa asked how to negotiate state laws that limit organizations from providing training on equity and implicit bias. Dr. Freeman said such limits were imposed at the federal level under the previous administration, but they were revoked by the current President. Ms. Das said that in her state, such training is acceptable if it is voluntary but cannot be mandated.

FEATURED SPEAKER

How We Help Children in Foster Care: Together We Rise!

Cade Duran, Montana 4-H, TLEI 2020 Cohort Member

As part of the 2020 TLEI cohort, Mr. Duran and his teammates created care packages for youth transitioning in to foster care. Montana has the second highest rate of removal from home into foster care in the United States. Often, such removals take place rapidly and under difficult circumstances, so most youth do not have time to pack any belongings. Because removal is common in the state, Mr. Duran said he and his teammates all had some personal connection to the foster care system.

The project set an ambitious goal of creating 500 care packs—backpacks filled with personal hygiene products, school supplies, blankets, books, and diversions. The team filled out 20 grant applications and reached out to about 100 businesses directly through social media and in

person to gather funds and donated items for the packs. They also made handmade blankets and led others, such as a local quilting group, in making blankets. Mr. Duran estimated that the project required \$33,000 in supplies, all of which was covered by in-kind or monetary donations, and the team exceeded their goal of 500 packs.

As this year's participants plan and implement their projects, Mr. Duran urged them to delegate the work, so that each team member shares the load, and to allow team members to play to their strengths, taking advantage of their unique skills, interests, and networks to contribute to the team's goal. The Montana team met about once a week to check in, make blankets, and deliver the care packs. Mr. Duran stressed the importance of staying committed throughout the project. He also suggested prioritizing the project and carving out regular time for it as a way to balance a busy schedule.

Mr. Duran offered tips for success:

- Work together as a team, delegating when possible but also stepping up to cover for one another when needed.
- Set high goals for the project.
- Involve the whole community.

SKILLS-BUILDING WORKSHOPS

Participants took part in one of two workshops, with each team having representation in each workshop.

Having the Courageous Conversation

Debbie McDonald, Project Director, Common Measures, Mission to Market, National 4-H Council, and Emily McDonald, 4-H Alumnus and Former 4-H Council Staff Member

The presenters described how to frame messages around potentially controversial proposals. They also discussed how to manage one's emotions in the heat of the moment by preparing an argument in advance that supports the proposal.

Emotional Intelligence

Doreen MacAulay, Ph.D., Instructor, School of Information Systems and Management, University of South Florida

There are strong emotions attached to Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion work. Dr. MacAulay led participants through a process of understanding emotional intelligence, being self-aware of our own use of emotions, and finally identifying steps to channel emotions for positive change. Emotions, according to Dr. MacAulay, are complex; she shared [Plutchik's wheel of emotions](#) to visualize how the many emotions interact with each other and affect our perceptions. Emotions exist in conversations about diversity, equity, and inclusion. Because we can't avoid them, it is critical for True Leaders to understand and appropriately deal with emotions to further our work.

Dr. MacAulay explained a working definition of emotional intelligence from D. Goleman (1995): *"the capacity to be aware of, control, and express one's emotions and to handle interpersonal*

relationships judiciously and empathetically.” Dr. MacAuley also helped participants understand the Amygdala hijack (when the brain reacts to psychological stress as if it’s in physical danger). We discussed how this reaction might derail our DEI efforts.

Assessing Emotional Intelligence	Developing Your EI: Next Steps
Mind Tools https://www.mindtools.com/pages/article/ei-quiz.htm	Self-reflection
Institute for Health and Human Potential: https://www.ihhp.com/free-eq-quiz/	Know what triggers emotions in you
Detailed Assessment with Limited Results (can buy full report): Psychology Today: https://www.psychologytoday.com/au/tests/personality/emotional-intelligence-test	Empathize with people Own your emotions Practice Mindfulness

FEATURED SPEAKER

Identity Matters

Jose Rosario, Graduate Research and Teaching Assistant, Clark University

Mr. Rosario described the perseverance of his parents—a Latino couple with limited English skills who were just 18 and 19 years old when they had their first child—in caring for him despite the complications and impairment resulting from his premature birth. Throughout his life, Mr. Rosario came to see that every choice matters and has implications for the future. Mr. Rosario’s parents chose not to define him by his disability. Instead, they learned to advocate for him and to push back against those who said that he would never have the kind of life that unimpaired people do.

Nonetheless, Mr. Rosario explained, he experienced hopelessness, frustration, isolation, and depression, especially in his teen years. He began volunteering as a way to cope with those feelings. He discovered a passion for advocating for healthy living and making the world better and chose to study psychology in college. While in college, Mr. Rosario continued to feel isolated and unsupported, but in a classroom discussion about diversity, he heard terms like “ableism” and “covert racism” and recognized them immediately. Naming those issues gave Mr. Rosario a new perspective, ultimately leading him to reconsider how identity matters. A professor encouraged him to think about his strengths rather than his limitations.

After graduating from college, Mr. Rosario was asked to speak about his personal experiences at a conference, and he found himself overwhelmed with emotion when he considered his whole life story—his many identities and complicated experiences. His talk moved people in the audience, and Mr. Rosario saw the value of connecting and sharing experiences as a vital aspect of mental health. He went on to start a nonprofit organization, Phoenix Empowered, which uses video, photography, and other narrative tools to highlight stories around mental health. It seeks to create inclusive spaces for people to feel empowered to tell their stories.

Mr. Rosario pointed out that each of us has a mix of identities, some of which offer privilege and some that are subject to oppression. Understanding who you are and the role you play is crucial. Mr. Rosario emphasized that no matter what people tell you they think you are capable of, you are limitless, your work can heal others, and you have purpose. He encouraged participants to be intentional, innovative, and bold in their efforts.

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Discussion

Mr. Rosario responded to various questions and comments posed via chat. He said he is always critical of himself and thinks he should be doing more, but such criticism is evidence that he cares deeply about what he does. He has learned that if he can connect to others, the details do not matter. Mr. Rosario urged participants to be gentle on themselves.

Mr. Rosario expressed that after his first conference presentation, he felt very emotional for days, as if a box had been ripped open and all the pieces of his life were coming together for the first time. He had struggled for so long because he did not think anyone would understand him. Phoenix Empowered aims to help people have difficult conversations, exploring what it feels like to be a person of color, a member of the LGBTQ+ community, or a person with a disability, for example. Understanding our identity is key to mental health.

To improve inclusivity in the context of mental health at the individual level, Mr. Rosario suggested active listening, paying close attention to what the speaker feels is important. Empathetic statements should be tailored so that they demonstrate an understanding of the speaker's unique experiences. On a community level, Mr. Rosario pointed to the need to make space for difficult conversations, perhaps with an individual who can guide the conversation. Mr. Rosario added that all steps toward building connection with others are valuable.

Participants summarized some of their takeaways in the chat box:

- Tears are the body's way of showing you that you want to heal.
- You can have courage without fear.
- Identity plays a huge role in mental health.
- Everyone has value.

NEXT STEPS

Ms. Atkinson explained that teams should begin preparing presentations for the October 9, 2021, TLEI Equity Project Showcase. She showed a video of a compelling pitch from a television show and invited participants to imagine that they would be speaking to people interested to invest in their project. Teams were instructed to prepare a pitch up to 3 minutes long that includes three elements:

- A high-level summary of the project goal(s)
- Immediate next steps
- What help is needed to implement the project

Ms. Atkinson urged participants to seek support from mentors who can help them with their pitch in the short term and assist with their projects in the long term.

Dr. Freeman thanked all the participants for their efforts. She particularly appreciated Mr. Rosario’s reminder that the work we do has purpose. In addition to being intentional, innovative, and bold, Dr. Freeman urged the participants to be courageous—pushing back against naysayers, helping others see their biases, and working to root out prejudice or lack of inclusion in 4-H settings. “Thank you for your commitment to making your community better and more equitable,” Dr. Freeman concluded.[§]

INSTANT POLL RESULTS

- | | |
|--|------|
| • The TLEI has helped me better understand the importance of equity. | 100% |
| • After attending the TLEI, I feel better prepared to do my equity project. | 95% |
| • After attending the TLEI, I feel more excited to get started on my equity project. | 100% |

[§] Process note: During debriefing, it was suggested that the Look Book include speakers’ contact information, as several participants requested that information. It was also suggested that a follow-up email to participants could include some or all of the notes from the conference, which participants might find useful for their work and for sharing with their state leaders to demonstrate the breadth and depth of the TLEI. Consideration should also be given to how to provide participants access to recordings.

Equity Project Showcase October 9, 2021

OVERVIEW

Four weeks after the 2021 TLEI, 4-H hosted the Equity Project Showcase for youth participants to present their refined project plans to the entire TLEI cohort. Participants explained what they hoped to do and accomplish over the next year, their immediate next steps, and where they need help and support from their mentors and others.

The primary objective of the Equity Project Showcase was to encourage the teams to make public commitments about what they intend to do and accomplish. A secondary goal was to give the participants a chance to practice pitching their ideas in front of a friendly and supportive audience, in preparation for proposing their projects to potential funders, donors, or decision-makers from whom they might seek support.

FEATURED SPEAKER

Expanding 4-H to Deaf and Blind Youth: A Success Story from Puerto Rico

Gleniarys N. Rivera Torres, 2020 TLEI Participant

As a result of the 2020 TLEI, Ms. Torres' team instituted Oye Mi Voz, Soy 4-H (Hear My Voice, I Am 4-H), a project to encourage youth who are deaf, blind, hard of hearing, or vision impaired to take part in 4-H. The first step was to foster reciprocal learning experiences during which Ms. Torres and her teammates exchanged knowledge with youth who are deaf or blind to better understand how 4-H clubs and events could be more inclusive. Team members learned they could overcome some communication gaps by getting training in American Sign Language (ASL). The team obtained funding to cover the costs of learning ASL, and 12 members of the team earned ASL certification after completing a 30-hour course. The team is also creating materials in Braille and a training guide describing best practices for including youth who are blind in 4-H programs. These are among the first steps to help 4-H clubs in Puerto Rico become more inclusive and welcoming, said Ms. Torres.

Ms. Torres looked forward to continued growth of the project, urging everyone to strive to make the world more inclusive for others. She expressed confidence that the goal of inclusivity would be reached in her 4-H club and eventually would spread across the world. Ms. Torres said being part of 4-H helped her become more assertive, confident, and comfortable speaking up—skills she knows will help her in the future as she looks forward to completing her college education and undertaking a career in science. In closing, Ms. Torres reminded the group that “Diversity is a fact; inclusion is an act,” as explained by Zabeen Hirji, an advisor on the future of work.

Diversity is a fact; inclusion is an act.

TEAM PRESENTATIONS

As the teams pitched their projects, other participants offered comments via the chat box, and the 4-H planning staff gave feedback. The common themes of the projects are summarized here. In some cases, teams had already begun laying the foundation for moving forward with their projects, and many have taken steps toward implementation. See the [appendix](#) for a brief description of each project and suggestions offered via chat.

Developing Resources

Several teams seek to produce materials to help others better understand and cultivate diversity, equity, and inclusion. Virginia aims to compile a comprehensive handbook on developing safe, inclusive practices in 4-H programs, while Ohio will create training videos on how to be an ally to underserved and marginalized populations. New York will craft a curriculum to help teens facilitate antiracism training, along with a documentary film that captures individual experiences with racism. New Jersey is putting together Positivity Packets that encourage individual exploration and self-reflection for better mental well-being, and New Hampshire will create at-home learning kits to help youth in middle school understand and address mental health concerns. Georgia will raise awareness of diversity through music, creating, among other things, a podcast that explores the contributions of marginalized people to music.

Identifying Equity Gaps

Leveraging the power of data, Florida will conduct community mapping to locate areas facing food insecurity and link individuals to local resources, including portable gardening systems. Minnesota will conduct an audit of equity needs at the county level and connect counties to equity training, with the ultimate goal of establishing countywide and statewide 4-H Equity Ambassadors. Iowa's equity mapping project will gather qualitative data through individual storytelling and narrative art about belonging that, combined with equity research, will form the basis for recommendations that the team will publish and disseminate.

Expanding Inclusivity

Teams like Puerto Rico are building on the successful 2020 TLEI project to increase the number of 4-H youth who are fluent in ASL so that programs can accommodate more deaf youth. (See the [4-H pledge in Spanish and ASL](#).) Missouri will launch the Gender and Sexualities Alliance so that more LGBTQ+ youth feel welcome in 4-H. Maryland is developing an afterschool tutoring program for elementary school youth in an underperforming school system. Indiana will reach out to youth with special needs through creative recycling projects that bring together teachers, students with special needs, current 4-H members and volunteers, and local recycling program staff.

Overall Observations

At the end of the presentations, participants were asked to offer one word to describe what came to mind from the presentations:



Charlie Sloop of Virginia suggested that future virtual TLEI gatherings include a “social lounge” where participants can continue to offer feedback, generate ideas, and forge bonds. Participant Jen McIver expressed the sentiments of many when she said she appreciated the passion and commitment shown in all of the presentations, as well as the efforts presenters put in to adapt to challenging situations so that they could pitch their projects at this meeting.

NEXT STEPS

Dr. Freeman explained that each team will be assigned a True Leaders Coach who will serve as a resource and provide feedback. Coaches may have experience working with the team’s target audience or solving challenges such as identifying strategic partners, fundraising, marketing, or designing 4-H projects. Each team will be connected to their True Leaders Coach within 2 weeks via email. Teams should meet with their coaches at least twice (once in November and again in the spring) but can meet more often if desired.

From February 22 to 24, 2022, groups of five or six teams will meet on each day to give progress reports. On May 19, 2022, all the teams will meet to provide final reports on their projects. When the projects are completed, teams are encouraged to make a presentation to their state 4-H Foundation and state 4-H program leaders.

In closing, Dr. Freeman thanked the design and planning team that created the TLEI and the Equity Project Showcase, as well as the funders, the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation and the W. K. Kellogg Foundation. Finally, she thanked the participants for their commitment to and passion for equity.

FUNDING OPPORTUNITIES

Citizenship Washington Focus brings 1,500 youth from all over the country to Washington, DC, each year to explore how they can become better citizens and leaders. The organization is looking for individuals who have a passion for working with young people, government, history, political science, education, public speaking, or leadership to be part of this 60-year tradition. These positions run from May 2022 to July 2022, and applications will open in November 2021. If you have questions, please contact Zach Hall at ZHall@fourhcouncil.edu or 301.961.2810.

America's Promise Alliance offers the Power of Youth Challenge: Youth Leading Racial Healing, a leadership and service opportunity for youth focused on promoting racial equity and addressing cultural awareness. The Challenge provides young people (ages 13–19) across the United States with the opportunity to identify a need in their communities related to racial healing and apply for a \$250 grant to support a service project. Applications will be reviewed on a rolling basis until limited funds are allocated. Learn more at <https://www.americaspromise.org/poy/RacialHealing>. Please feel free to reach out to us at carinnew@americaspromise.org with any questions.

APPENDIX: 2021 True Leaders in Equity Team Projects

State (Extension)	Project Description	Needs Identified	Suggestions from the Showcase
Florida (University of Florida)	Bringing Health Equity to Food-Insecure Areas: Work with community organizations to identify and map areas of food insecurity, link individuals to local resources, including tools for growing their own food.	Need help identifying local organizations that can assist with mapping and resources to obtain portable gardening systems.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Connect with local food pantries. • Look for information and resources available through your extension’s family and consumer sciences divisions. • Seek out the Master Gardener program in your county.
Georgia (University of Georgia)	Voices from the Margins: Through a podcast, community engagement, and social media, use music to raise awareness about the struggles, contributions, and triumphs of marginalized people as a method for growing empathy and understanding.		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The topic is broad; consider focusing on one aspect at a time over the coming years. • Ask TLEI youth participants whether they might be interested in joining in some future podcasts to share about music that is meaningful to them.
Indiana/Dearborn (Purdue University)	4-H Is Also for You: Bring together youth with special needs, their teachers, local recycling center staff, and 4-H members and volunteers to craft creative recycling projects to display at the county fair as a step toward enhancing communication and demonstrating how youth with special needs can participate in 4-H.	Need to determine how to access schools and how many classrooms and students to involve.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Consider teaching people without disabilities about disability etiquette and misconceptions.
Indiana/LaPorte (Purdue University)	Respect Who I Am: Research the effect on mental health of improper use of chosen pronouns and names and educate and practice use of chosen pronouns and names to support inclusion.	How do we successfully communicate the project to a conservative community and support the use of chosen names?	<i>Not applicable; project not presented at the Equity Project Showcase.</i>

State (Extension)	Project Description	Needs Identified	Suggestions from the Showcase
Iowa (Iowa State University)	Mapping Belonging of Iowa Youth: Conduct and implement research to create increased opportunities and welcoming spaces for youth from all marginalized groups in Iowa 4-H.	Funding needed to collect data and for travel to disseminate data.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Funding may be available through your 4-H Foundation. • Think about how you will empower other teens to assist with your project.
Maryland (University of Maryland)	Education Inequity: Provide extracurricular opportunities, such as tutoring, for elementary students in the Allegany County region to help compensate for gaps in their local schools' performance.	Seeking cooperation from the local school system and the local Salvation Army club tutoring program to promote the program and to better understand students' needs; need teachers to offer guidance on tutoring and student volunteers to serve as tutors.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Make an appointment to meet in person with the Salvation Army club to discuss your project and get answers to your questions. • Use a teen as a teacher model. • Start small and grow. • Look for existing 4-H training materials for preparing students to teach and tutor.
Minnesota (University of Minnesota)	Equity Audit: Invite counties to participate in audits to identify equity issues and connect them with equity training, laying the groundwork for a youth equity leadership group or 4-H Equity Ambassadors.	Get buy-in from local 4-H staff and youth leaders.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Connect with the Iowa team, which is taking a similar approach. • Reach out to the Wisconsin 4-H, with created a rubric for teens to assess how welcoming their 4-H clubs and programs are. (Contact Melanie Forstrom at maf357@cornell.edu.) • Consider disseminating the results of the audit. • Involve favorite teachers who can help students feel more comfortable.
Missouri (Missouri University)	Make 4-H More Inclusive for LGBTQ+ Youth in Missouri: Launch a Gender and Sexualities Alliance to normalize LGBTQ+ members' participation in 4-H, build a website to enroll youth in the group, and expand outreach to LGBTQ+ youth.	Seeking ideas on how to reach youth outside of urban areas.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Look for guest speakers who are also 4-H alumni. • Connect with Michigan 4-H, where some are building a similar alliance. • Connect with Iowa 4-H, which has a gender and sexuality alliance and is partnering with a LGBTQ+ youth-

State (Extension)	Project Description	Needs Identified	Suggestions from the Showcase
			<p>serving organization to expand its reach.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Contact Mayyadah Zagelow, who launched the Washington State 4-H Teen Equity and Inclusion Task Force • See the curriculum from the 4-H Access, Equity, and Belonging Committee for proven practices you can use in your educational program.
New Hampshire (New Hampshire)	Middle Schoolers Rock Mental Health: Create a safe space for middle school youth to learn more about mental health awareness and coping skills through at-home kits and either a virtual or in-person experience.	Seeking suggestions of media (e.g., movies, books) with relatable themes or examples of mental health concerns relevant to middle school students.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ask middle schools to offer rooms where students can relax. • Look at work by Change to Chill. • Consider a virtual town hall meeting about mental health to kickstart the project. • Consider sponsoring training on mental health first aid for adults in the schools. • <i>The Art of Focused Conversation for Schools</i>, by Jo Nelson, may be a tool to help build the conversation. • Look for ways to involve school boards.
New Jersey (Rutgers/New Jersey Agricultural Experiment Station)	Therapy Services at School: Create “positivity packets” containing group and self-guided activities for mindfulness, positive affirmations, self-reflection to enhance mental well-being.		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • See Iowa’s Make It Okay program to combat the stigma around mental health.
New Jersey/Camden (Rutgers/New Jersey Agricultural Experiment Station)	Advancing English-Language Learners Road to Success Network: Create a network modeled on the Upward Bound program to support Upward	Learn what kind of support Upward Bound alumni need once they are in college or the workforce and how the new	<i>Not applicable; project not presented at the Equity Project Showcase.</i>

State (Extension)	Project Description	Needs Identified	Suggestions from the Showcase
	Bound alumni in college or the workforce.	network can best support them.	
New York (Cornell University)	Act for Change FiTs: Develop a facilitator-in-training (FiT) program to give graduates of the Act for Change teen antiracism program tools to facilitate more antiracism efforts and create a documentary that highlights individual experiences.		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Connect with Laura Liechty and Tiffany Berkeness in Iowa.
Ohio (The Ohio State University)	Building Inclusivity into the System: Educate 4-H members and volunteers on making 4-H a more welcoming and inclusive environment through ally training videos, guest speakers, and creation of a flag or banner.	Looking for guidance on creating videos.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • See the many related resources available on the e-Extension platform. • Missouri 4-H has a video/movie-making workshop and might have resources on how to make a video. • Use WeVideo, a web-based video editor (requires purchase). • Think about potential areas of overlap with the Minnesota team's equity audits. • Connect with Iowa, which is creating a series of videos for volunteers. • Check with the schools to see if they have any gender and sexuality alliance groups you can work with. • iMovie and Splice are perfect resources for becoming more familiar with making videos in an easier way. • Screen-castomatic is a free videomaking online program for short videos (15 minute or less).

State (Extension)	Project Description	Needs Identified	Suggestions from the Showcase
			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> CANVA now has a presentation video/sound tool.
Pennsylvania (Penn State University)	4-H for All: Educate and develop current and new leaders to recognize inequities and eliminate barriers by creating individualistic goals to assist youth who are or want to be in 4-H.	Need funding, more data regarding leaders and members, and potential projects.	<i>Not applicable; project not presented at the Equity Project Showcase.</i>
Puerto Rico (University of Puerto Rico)	Oye+, More than Signs: Build on previous equity project to advance sign language training and certification, create educational materials, and develop partnerships to expand community outreach to increase inclusion of deaf youth.	Need to build alliances with area organizations, review relevant laws, and consider options for integrating the deaf into 4-H activities.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Share the video of the 4-H pledge in Spanish and ASL.
Virginia (Virginia Tech/Virginia State University)	How to Reach Equity and Inclusion: Action, Advice, Affirmation: Create a comprehensive guide to diversity, equity, and inclusion practices in 4-H programs and make it broadly available and customizable in print, digital, and audio formats.	Seeking input from 4-H participants on their experiences and perspectives.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Make the handbook available to all 4-H groups in all states. As you conduct training on use of the handbook, use stories and dialogues as a way to engage participants. Connect with the Minnesota 4-H, which launched a First Generation 4-H-er effort. Contact Jacquie Lonning at jlonning@umn.edu. Use the 2021 TLEI Cohort email list to reach out to participants for input.