NIH UNITE

December 9, 2022

Alfred C. Johnson, PhD
UNITE Overview

UNITE is a working group that reports to the NIH Steering Committee and acts as a think tank to promote equity, generate bold ideas, and catalyze new actions. Collectively, it identifies and addresses any structural racism that may exist within the NIH and throughout the biomedical and behavioral workforce.
The NIH UNITE Initiative to Strengthen Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion: Together, We’re Stronger.

Purpose:

• The UNITE Progress Report describes NIH’s actions to identify and address structural racism that may exist within NIH and in the biomedical and behavioral research enterprise.

• The report (FY21–22) is the first UNITE progress report. It was developed in collaboration with UNITE co-chairs, committees, and stakeholders.

• The report focuses on health disparities and minority health research, the internal NIH workforce, and the external research workforce—topics that intersect and enable greater transparency, accountability, and communication across NIH and the biomedical and behavioral community.
• As of summer 2022, UNITE leadership and committees developed their Challenge Statements and Goals, which indicated “focus areas” for action.

• The report describes select milestones and accomplishments associated with each focus area during FY21–22.
The NIH UNITE Initiative to Strengthen Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion: Together, We’re Stronger.

• UNITE was publicly launched at a special meeting of the Advisory Committee to the Director on February 26, 2021, with a commitment from former NIH Director Francis Collins, M.D., Ph.D., to identify and address structural racism in biomedical and behavioral science.

• The groundwork for UNITE began with a series of pivotal internal conversations around structural racism’s role in health disparities and the biomedical and behavioral research enterprise. UNITE was built on the foundation of the activities across NIH within its Institutes and Centers, and NIH Offices involved in equity and inclusion, including:

  o Office of Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion (EDI)
  o Office of Human Resources (OHR)
  o Civil Program
  o Chief Officer for Scientific Workforce Diversity Office (COSWD)
  o Office of Extramural Research (OER)
  o Office of Intramural Research (OIR)

2020

February 2021
Special meeting of the Advisory Committee to the Director to externally announce UNITE, and Dr. Collins publicly acknowledges structural racism in the biomedical and behavioral research enterprise.

March 2021
March 1, 2021, UNITE website launched, including Dr. Collins’ statement acknowledging structural racism. RFI released soliciting input from the biomedical and behavioral research community.

FOA: Common Fund Transformative Research to Address Health Disparities and Advance Health Equity

FOA: NHGRI Effects of Structural Racism and Discrimination on Health Disparities and Inequalities

Establishment of an NIH-wide Anti-Racism Steering Committee

April 2021
UNITE RIs closes

2021

Summer 2020
NIH leadership and IC Directors meet with internal stakeholders to deliberate on societal changes highlighting the impact of racial and ethnic inequalities—disproportionate mortality and morbidity from COVID-19 and racially motivated violence.

October 2020
Internal launch of UNITE

2021

February 2021
Special meeting of the Advisory Committee to the Director to externally announce UNITE, and Dr. Collins publicly acknowledges structural racism in the biomedical and behavioral research enterprise.

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FOA: Common Fund Transformative Research to Address Health Disparities and Advance Health Equity

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Establishment of an NIH-wide Anti-Racism Steering Committee

April 2021
UNITE RIs closes

2022

December 2021–January 2022
UNITE Learning Sessions

January 2022
Launch of UNITE Co-Director Career

April 2022
NIH ICs submit Racial and Ethnic Equity Plans (REEPs)

Experience of Science Education Partnership Awards Program (ESPA)

May 2022
NHGRI Council approves three concepts generated by UNITE: Institutional Climate Assessment and DEI Action Plan Development Grants, Excellence in DEI Investigators’ Grants, and Institution Grant Program for Minority-serving Institutions

NHGIC Council approves concept generated by UNITE: Institutional Research Capacity Building Needs Assessment and Action Plan Development Grants

Planned Winter 2022/2023
Launch of DEIA Institutional Prize competition
UNITE’s five committees have coordinated objectives for tackling the challenge of racial and ethnic equity in science. Each committee has a unique mission, while working collaboratively to develop methods that enhance equity across the scientific enterprise.

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<tr>
<th>U COMMITTEE</th>
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<tr>
<td>Understand stakeholder experiences through listening and learning</td>
<td>Facilitate and develop new research on HD/MH</td>
<td>Improve the NIH culture and structure for equity, inclusion, and excellence</td>
<td>Foster transparency, communication, and accountability with internal and external stakeholders</td>
<td>Change policy, culture, and structure to promote diversity and inclusion in the extramural research ecosystem</td>
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UNITE recognizes the challenges associated with addressing racial and ethnic equity in science. To create meaningful objectives, UNITE identified concrete challenges and goals. The report discusses progress toward each goal as a separate focus area.

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<th>REPORT FOCUS AREA</th>
<th>CHALLENGE</th>
<th>GOAL</th>
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<tr>
<td><strong>1</strong> ELEVATING</td>
<td>Minority Health (MH) and Health Disparities (HD) research and related disciplines and methodologies remain understudied in many areas and research prioritization and expenditures are insufficient to address existing gaps.</td>
<td>Encourage and provide tools to support ICs in prioritizing MH and HD research to address existing gaps, including Joining relevant funding opportunity announcements (FOAs) and optimizing funding levels for MH and HD research over the next 5 years.</td>
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<td>health disparities and minority health research across ICs</td>
<td>Across the NIH extramural community, funding success rates for grant applications supporting scientists from underrepresented racial and ethnic groups have been shown to be lower compared with their non-Hispanic white peers.</td>
<td>Reduce disparities in NIH funding rates such that race and ethnicity are not predictive of or correlated with funding success. Ensure that funding success rates for institutions that have shown a historical commitment to educating students from underrepresented groups are on par with that of other institutions.</td>
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<td><strong>2</strong> PROMOTING</td>
<td>Equity in the NIH-supported biomedical research ecosystem</td>
<td>Elevating health disparities and minority health research across institutes and centers</td>
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<td></td>
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<td>Promoting equity in the NIH-supported biomedical research ecosystem</td>
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UNITE recognizes the challenges associated with addressing racial and ethnic equity in science. To create meaningful objectives, UNITE identified concrete challenges and goals. The report discusses progress toward each goal as a separate focus area.
UNITE and the NIH Ecosystem

UNITE operates in tandem with other DEIA-related entities within and outside of NIH. To ensure high levels of collaboration and minimize redundancies, UNITE co-chairs and committees aligned their goals with the fundamental tenets of the NIH Wide Strategic Plan for 2021–2025 and the NIH Minority Health and Health Disparities Strategic Plan 2021–2025.

The NIH-Wide DEIA Strategic Plan for 2022–2026, slated for release in fall 2022, incorporates UNITE and its tenets within the wider DEIA umbrella.
Focus Area 1: Elevating Health Disparities and Minority Health Research Across Institutes and Centers

• **Focus Area 1.** Ensures that NIH Institutes and Centers prioritize health disparities and minority health research across clinical trials and human subject research.

• **Example of Progress.** UNITE helped facilitate the development of the Common Fund’s Transformative Research to Address Health Disparities and Advance Health Equity initiative and the Community Partnerships to Advance Science for Society (ComPASS) Initiative.

• **What’s Next.** UNITE will continue enhancing its understanding of NIH investments in health disparities research in partnership with NIH stakeholders and fostering the design and implementation of new initiatives to enhance HD/MH research.
Focus Area 1: Progress Snapshot

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<th>ISSUE</th>
<th>ACTIVITIES</th>
<th>INTENDED CHANGE</th>
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| Underfunded HD/MH translational research projects and low research capacity at MSIs. | • Launched Common Fund [webpage](https://www.nih.gov/ending-structural-racism) for the Transformative Research to Address Health Disparities and Advance Health Equity Initiative.  
  • Released RFA-MD-21-004, RFA-RM-21-021, RFA-RM-21-022, and reissued RFA-RM-21-022. | Will fund and expand the capacity of HD/MH research at research institutions, including MSIs with a historical commitment to training individuals from underrepresented groups. |
| Insufficient NIH-wide transparency, accountability, and sustainability regarding HD/MH research funding. | • Developed an automated method to characterize the NIH HD/MH research portfolio and apply additional strategies to identify the research portfolio more precisely.  
  • Worked with the National Library of Medicine (NLM) to expand Medical Subject Headings (MeSH terms) pertaining to the social determinants of health. | Will improve transparency, accountability, and sustainability of HD/MH research, and facilitate analysis of grant application and award data to assess any identified structural inequities and track progress. |
| Scarcity of community-driven health disparities research and structural interventions. | • Fostered the design of the FY23 Community Partnerships to Advance Science for Society initiative via the [Common Fund](https://www.nih.gov/ending-structural-racism). | Will bolster interventions to enhance HD/MH research through a 10-year research investment of nearly $400 million. |

UNITE has worked to enhance this mission, incorporating HD/MH research as part of Focus Area 1 and encouraging ICs to prioritize this type of research across clinical trials and human subject research.
Focus Area 2: Promoting Equity in the NIH-Supported Biomedical Research Ecosystem

• **Focus Area 2.** Promotes diversity and inclusion in the NIH extramural research ecosystem.

• **Example of Progress.** UNITE spurred the development of the [Harassment Reporting Portal](#) to explicitly include reports of discrimination and hostile work environments at grantee institutions.

• **What’s Next.** UNITE is anticipating the release of new priority programs to enhance workforce diversity, equity, and inclusion in FY23.
Focus Area 2: Progress Snapshot

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<th>INTENDED CHANGE</th>
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<td>Urgent need to ensure that diverse scientific talent is nurtured,</td>
<td>• Launched <em>Faculty Institutional Recruitment for Sustainable Transformation</em> (FIRST) program.</td>
<td>Will facilitate institutions in the recruitment of early-career faculty who have a demonstrated commitment to inclusive excellence, and positively support faculty development, retention, progression, and eventual promotion.</td>
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<td>recognized, and supported across all groups.</td>
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<td>Students from underserved communities experience barriers to</td>
<td>• Expanded the <em>Science Education Partnership Awards</em> (SEPA).</td>
<td>Will provide opportunities for students from underserved communities to consider careers in basic or clinical research, provide teachers with professional development in science content, and improve community health literacy.</td>
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<td>advancement in their scientific training, leading to persistent</td>
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<td>underrepresentation of certain groups in the scientific workforce.</td>
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<td>Institutions are not sufficiently incentivized to prioritize DEIA as</td>
<td>• Planned and solicited public comment for DEIA Institutional Prize.</td>
<td>Will acknowledge and reward transformative interventions developed by institutions to create research environments that promote and value DEIA.</td>
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<td>a foundation of their operations.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Certain groups remain underrepresented in the scientific workforce</td>
<td>• Received NIGMS Council clearance for three new initiatives to support extramural DEIA efforts.</td>
<td>Institutions will receive support to conduct organizational climate assessments and conduct needs assessments. Support will enhance the research portfolio of Principal Investigators who prioritize DEIA and develop research capacity at low-resource MSIs.</td>
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<td>due to systemic and structural barriers.</td>
<td>• Received NIMHD Council clearance for a new initiative to support extramural DEIA efforts and enhance MSI capacity.</td>
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Scientific innovation and progress are driven by a workforce that is diverse, inclusive, and equitable. The report highlights some of the extramural DEIA initiatives that NIH is engaged in.
Focus Area 3: Promoting Equity in the Internal NIH Workforce

- **Focus Area 3.** Concentrates on enhancing equity within the NIH internal workforce, role modeling expectations of the external biomedical ecosystem.

- **Example of Progress.** New initiatives driven by UNITE include the Anti-Racism Steering Committee (ARSC), comprised of more than 500 volunteers, which was established to help address racial and ethnic equity in the internal NIH workforce.

- **What’s Next.** UNITE will continue to bolster NIH’s culture of inclusive excellence and support diverse and equitable hiring practices.
## Focus Area 3: Progress Snapshot

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<th>ISSUE</th>
<th>ACTIVITIES</th>
<th>INTENDED CHANGE</th>
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</table>
| Need for a coordinated anti-racism advisory body, akin to the Anti-Harassment Steering Committee, with representation from all NIH ICs. | • Established the NIH-wide Anti-Racism Steering Committee.  
  • Generated a new initiative to enhance outreach regarding NIH job opportunities to ensure a broad range and diversity of applicants. | Will guide NIH-wide efforts to address organizational issues to promote equity. |
| Variations in IC-level organizational cultures lead to racial and ethnic disparities in IC workforces. | • Guided the development of NIH IC and OD Racial & Ethnic Equity Plans. | Will identify areas that may lead to apparent inequities and provide interventions or policy changes to mitigate any identified issues. |
| Insufficient transparency and accountability of NIH-internal workforce metrics to assess progress toward equity goals. | • Published data on the demographic composition and profiles of the NIH workforce to promote transparency. | Will enhance the availability and quality of NIH workforce data. |
| Limited staff representation and diversity in NIH building portraits. | • Spearheaded The Power of an Inclusive Workplace Recognition Project. | Staff will see themselves represented throughout NIH buildings and online and experience a greater sense of inclusiveness. |
| Disparities in nominations for NIH Director’s Awards by demographics, grade, and workforce category. | • Establish a task force to recommend changes to the NIH Director’s Awards. | Will recognize and celebrate the accomplishments of staff at all levels and across all workforces. |
| Perception of structural inequity for staff at the GS-11 level and below. | • Developed a career development opportunity for staff at the GS-11 and lower levels. | Will provide skills development opportunities and focus on equity in NIH-wide career development opportunities. |

NIH seeks to solve many of the world’s health and well-being challenges. The mission relies on the contributions of thousands of diverse staff and researchers.
Focus Area 4: Improving Accuracy and Transparency of Racial and Ethnic Equity Data

• **Focus Area 4.** Improves accuracy and transparency of racial and ethnic and equity data by maintaining and disseminating its data dashboard and associated data visualizations.

• **Example of Progress.** UNITE hosted 14 internal and external listening sessions with over 1,300 participants to learn and gather information, which is being translated into action.

• **What’s Next.** UNITE will continue to intentionally create opportunities to listen to the needs and experiences of its audiences.

“The general principle of data sharing equals good science. It ensures transparency, it ensures a greater confidence in what scientists are doing. And obviously, it also extends the value of what scientists are doing.” – Larry Tabak, D.D.S., Ph.D.

Source: [https://hdsr.mitpress.mit.edu/pub/kdgve0dl/release/4](https://hdsr.mitpress.mit.edu/pub/kdgve0dl/release/4)
In 2021, former NIH Director Dr. Francis Collins publicly committed to stand against structural racism in biomedical and behavioral research by identifying and correcting scientific policies and practices that may have helped to perpetuate structural racism. Foundational to these efforts is strengthening the accuracy and transparency of data.
UNITE intends to expand its efforts in the coming years—from new funding opportunities, to expanded educational programs, to enhanced data transparency. This will be done with an eye to evaluating the program's short, medium, and long-term impacts. NIH is proud of UNITE’s achievements thus far and looks forward to additional meaningful achievements with the help of its dedicated volunteers and subject matter experts.

“Injustice anywhere is a threat to justice everywhere. We are caught in an inescapable network of mutuality, tied in a single garment of destiny. Whatever affects one directly affects all indirectly.”

– Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.
“Letter from Birmingham Jail”
Focus Area 1: Elevating Health Disparities and Minority Health Research

Monica Webb Hooper, PhD
Facilitate. Communicate. Amplify

• **Facilitate** monitoring and evaluation of the [NIH Minority Health and Health Disparities Strategic Plan 2021-2025](https://nih.gov/ending-structural-racism)
  - Automated methodology to identify, characterize, and analyze the minority health and health disparities research portfolio

• **Communicate** trends (between 2018-2022) in funding opportunity announcements (FOAs) focused on minority health and health disparities research

• **Amplify** active and upcoming minority health and health disparities research initiatives across NIH
The NIH UNITE Initiative to Strengthen Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion: Together, We’re Stronger.

FOAs Related to Minority Health and Health Disparities, 2018-2022

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Number of FOAs</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2018</td>
<td>18</td>
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<tr>
<td>2019</td>
<td>22</td>
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<tr>
<td>2020</td>
<td>65</td>
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<tr>
<td>2021</td>
<td>77</td>
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<tr>
<td>2022</td>
<td>115</td>
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Distribution of Minority Health and Health Disparities FOAs by Year and ICs, 2018-2022
Distribution of Minority Health and Health Disparities FOAs by Mechanism, 2018-2022

- **R01 Equivalent (R01, U01)** (94)
- Other Research (R13, R25, S11, S25, U13, U18, U56, UG1) (35)
- Other RPG (R03, R21, R24, R33, R34, R41-R44) (100)
- Centers (33)
- Resource (1)
- Training (17)
- Research Careers (K) (17)

**Administrative Supplements included in Other Research**
The initiative supports:

(1) Observational research to understand the role of structural racism and discrimination (SRD) in causing and sustaining health disparities

(2) Intervention research that addresses SRD to improve minority health or reduce health disparities.
Understanding and Addressing the Impact of Structural Racism and Discrimination on Minority Health and Health Disparities
(RFA-MD-21-004, R01 Clinical Trial Optional)

- Number of Participating ICOs: 25
- Number of Applications: 163
- Number Awarded: 38 (23%)
- PI Early-Stage Investigator: 5
- PI New Investigator (not ESI): 10

- **Types of Studies**: Majority Observational
- **Populations**: ~62% focus on multiple groups (Highest single group focus was African American at 21%)
- **Themes**: Wide range of disease/conditions and approaches consistent with the ICO mission.
  - Examples – Alzheimer’s, medication treatment for opioid use disorder, emergency department transfers, HIV treatment, and environmental systems and occupational health policy impact on agricultural workers
Cross-Cutting Themes and Emphases among New Minority Health and Health Disparities-Related FOAs Published in 2022

• Approaches to reduce health disparities, advance health equity across the lifespan
• Roles of social determinants of health (SDOH) in health and disparities
  - Individual SDOH (e.g., access to healthcare, food insecurity, perceived racism, medical mistrust, stigma, social support)
  - Structural SDOH (e.g., structural racism, poverty, neighborhood and built environment)
• Community engagement and principles of community engaged research
• Multilevel interventions (e.g., interpersonal, community, health systems)
• Increase recruitment of populations with health disparities
• Example disease, condition, and behavioral areas: HIV/AIDS, cancer, cardiovascular disease, mental health, and substance misuse (including opioids and alcohol)
New 2022 MH and HD-Related FOAs Exemplifying Cross-Cutting Themes

- Maternal Health Research Centers of Excellence (RFA-HD-23-035)
- Notice of Special Interest (NOSI): Preventive Interventions to Address Cardiometabolic Risk Factors in Populations that Experience Health Disparities (NOT-OD-22-154)
- HEAL Initiative: Prevention and Management of Chronic Pain in Rural Populations (RFA-NR-23-001)
- Notice of Special Interest (NOSI): Increasing Uptake of Evidence-Based Screening in Diverse Populations Across the Lifespan (NOT-OD-22-106)
- Understanding and Addressing Misinformation among Populations that Experience Health Disparities (RFA-MD-22-008)
Community Partnerships to Advance Science for Society (COMPASS)

Overall Goals:

- To catalyze, deploy, and evaluate community-led health equity structural interventions that leverage partnerships across multiple sectors to reduce health disparities
- To develop a new health equity research model for community-led, multisectoral structural intervention research across NIH and other federal agencies

Funding Opportunities Published

- **OTA-22-007**: ComPASS Program: Community-Led, Health Equity Structural Interventions Initiative
- **RFA-RM-23-001**: Community Partnerships to Advance Science for Society (ComPASS): Coordination Center
Focus Area 2: Funding Extramural Research to Enhance Diversity and Inclusion

Alfred C. Johnson, PhD
Requirements for Internal Controls

• Recipient organizations’ internal controls should be in compliance with guidance in “Standards for Control in the Federal Government.” (45 CFR 75.303(a)). Thus, recipient organizations are expected to establish codes of conduct which define expectations of integrity and ethical values and criteria of competence of personnel involved in the work supported by NIH grant funds.

• Codes of conduct should articulate expectations to assure compliance with terms and conditions of award, including but not limited to ... assuring work environments are free of discriminatory harassment and are safe and conducive to high-quality work (NIH GPS Chapter 4).
Focus Area 4: Improving Accuracy and Transparency of Data

Alfred C. Johnson, PhD
Comments and Suggestions to Advance and Strengthen Racial Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion in the Biomedical Research Workforce and Advance Health Disparities and Health Equity Research

December 9, 2022
ACD Meeting
Background

• Released March 1 – April 23, 2021, with 9 questions covering four areas

• Over 1,100 responses
  • Self-selection at time of submission
  • HBCUs coded using U.S. Department of Education HBCU list

Distribution of Respondent Types

- Academic (Includes 2% HBCUs) 46%
- NIH Staff 13%
- Health Professional 11%
- Nonprofit/Professional Society 8%
- Student/Postdoc Researcher 6%
- Other (e.g., Advocacy Organizations, Members of the Public, and more) 16%

Approach

• To capture, organize, and provide a summation of the responses to the RFI
• Recommendations proposed by respondents
  • Some may not be within NIH’s purview
  • Some have already been proposed, considered, implemented
• Terminology within the report reflects respondents’ language to the greatest extent possible to avoid inaccurate interpretation or overinterpretation of respondent comments
Cross-Cutting Themes

common threads that emerged throughout the 5 key topic areas
Rollout

Publish Full Report and Executive Summary on the UNITE website and shared through various channels

Provide report to those who responded to the RFI and provided contact information

Utilize responses to continue to listen and learn and enhance our work!
UNITE Leadership Changes: New Co-Chairs

Alfred C. Johnson, PhD
New UNITE Co-Chair

Noni Byrnes, PhD
Center for Scientific Review
New Committee Co-Chairs

U Committee

Shelli Avenevoli, PhD
National Institute of Mental Health

N Committee

Kathy Etz, PhD
National Institute on Drug Abuse

N Committee

Monica Webb Hooper, PhD
National Institute on Minority Health and Health Disparities

N Committee

Xinzhi Zhang, MD, PhD, FACE, FRSM
National Heart, Lung, and Blood Institute
New Committee Co-Chairs

I Committee

Laura M. Koehly, PhD
National Human Genome Research Institute

Kevin Williams
Office of Equity, Diversity and Inclusion

T Committee

Mohammed Aiyegbo, PhD
National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Diseases
Moving Forward

• Continue to center focus areas to guide UNITE activities and reporting
• Shift to annual update to ACD
Questions?
Read the UNITE Progress Report
Follow UNITE: LinkedIn
Sign up for UNITE Updates
Read the monthly Co-Chairs’ Corner

Thank you!