Bridges to Equity: A Promising Beginning

AIR Equity Initiative Annual Report | 2021–2022
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Acknowledgements

We want to thank the many individuals and partners who contributed to the promising beginning of the AIR Equity Initiative. A special thanks goes to Kimberly DuMont for her tireless and visionary work that led to the successful launch of the AIR Equity Initiative and a diverse portfolio of funded projects aligned with AIR’s mission to generate and use rigorous evidence that contributes to a better, more equitable world. Kim was the first leader of the AIR Equity Initiative and brought her expertise, experience, and passion for equity to this effort.

Additionally, we acknowledge our Board of Directors, CEO and President David Myers, AIR Fellows, external reviewers, and others whose vision, leadership, and guidance shaped this work. Finally, we want to recognize our AIR colleagues and leadership who offered guidance, feedback, and support to the AIR Equity Initiative team.

Our Commitment to Equity

A Message from Pat Gurin, Chair, AIR Board of Directors, and David Myers, AIR President and CEO

The American Institutes for Research’s (AIR) commitment to its mission is unwavering. In November 2020, the AIR Board of Directors authorized a five-year, $105 million landmark investment to create the AIR Equity Initiative. This commitment reinforces AIR’s aim to live its mission through more intentional generation and use of evidence to address the most urgent challenge we face globally: inequity.

The AIR Equity Initiative leverages our research and technical assistance expertise and builds and expands partnerships to better understand the challenges we are facing in the United States and around the globe, explore viable solutions, and narrow opportunity gaps that are rooted in historic and systemic inequity. Through competitive grant making, partnerships, and commissioned studies, we are challenging ourselves and others to work differently, to embrace diversity and foster inclusion, to work with urgency to address these vexing issues, and to learn from each other.

In this report, we describe accomplishments we have made to contribute to a more just society through substantive improvement in the lives of individuals and communities that have been segregated by race or place. We highlight initial funding of inclusive and collaborative research and technical assistance efforts that engage community members and other partners who bring diverse perspectives as we seek relevant solutions and long-term change.

We are off to a strong start, and there is much work still to be done. We hope you will continue with us on this journey toward creating a better and more equitable world.
Development of the AIR Equity Initiative Agenda

The AIR Equity Initiative stands on evidence gathered in two foundational landscape analyses; four years of dialogue, funding, and debate; and more than 100 conversations with stakeholders. Based on what we learned and given the complexities and long history of segregation, the AIR Equity Initiative focuses on policies, programs, and practices at the intersection of community, school, and work. Conversations with leading segregation and change experts, Board members, and policy leaders, and insights from literature reviews, suggested a need to focus on nurturing new ideas; engaging deeply with those who understand local systems, politics, and practice; and where appropriate, building capacity to systematically collect data to better study community-driven approaches to change. In response, the AIR Equity Initiative pursues a range of approaches related to policy implementation and educational equity, issues around scaling a more inclusive workforce development system, and learning from emerging ideas and efforts to enhance public safety and improve policing.
Our Work: Strategies for Advancing Equity

The AIR Equity Initiative is investing in the generation and use of high-quality evidence to address the harmful effects of segregation by race and place. We fund new or under-resourced efforts at the intersection of our programmatic areas to improve educational experiences, enhance justice in public safety and policing, and strengthen economic mobility for underserved communities. As part of our core operating principles, we support and engage in partnerships with stakeholders who are directly affected by the inequities we seek to address and with those who influence and drive decision making. Further, our work advances efforts that incorporate the perspectives of individuals with diverse experiences and expertise to shape approaches and solutions that are responsive to the communities with whom we work.

We use three complementary strategies to reach our goals: (1) **formal grant competitions**, (2) **sole-source grants and commissioned work** (i.e., awards not made through a competitive process), and (3) **strategic partnerships to elevate diverse perspectives**. In addition, we extend the reach, impact, and shape of our work through **communication and engagement** activities that invite dialogue and encourage action. Our goal is that the research, tools, capacity, and relationships developed through the AIR Equity Initiative will inform policy and shape practice, ultimately encouraging a more peaceful society where communities and residents thrive.

Grant Competitions and Commissioned Projects 2021–2022

In our first 16 months (April 2021–Sept. 2022), the AIR Equity Initiative made more than 30 awards to support efforts that collectively drive toward our mission of contributing to a better, more equitable world. The research studies we funded are designed to learn what holds promise for integrating communities and schools and mitigating the harmful effects of segregation by race and place. Awards for tools and capacity-building efforts are designed to facilitate change locally or nationally. Together, these projects advance ideas to develop new measures and approaches for collaborating and partnering across systems, disciplines, and stakeholder groups.

Improving Educational Experiences

Educational Equity Through Policy Implementation Grant Competition

The Educational Equity Through Policy Implementation grants seek to contribute to an educational system where one’s race and place of residence no longer predict access to the opportunities and resources that promote thriving and academic success. The goal of the competition is to acknowledge that although a wide array of policies exists to achieve these ends, they may fall short due to limited resources or implementation challenges. These grants seek to bridge this gap through projects that study and develop processes and tools, in partnership with stakeholders, to improve policy implementation and, thus, lead to better educational experiences and outcomes for students affected by the consequences of segregation.
Educational Equity Commissioned Projects

Three noncompetitive awards were made to strengthen and learn from policy and technical assistance efforts to reduce racial segregation in housing and education across communities, districts, schools, and classrooms.

Improving Educational Experiences—By The Numbers

- **9** Projects Funded
- **27 States**
- **$14,281,750** Total Dollars Awarded
- **13** Number of Partners Engaged

Improving Attendance Policies Through the Equitable Attendance Policy Partnership

This project examines how attendance policies are implemented and investigates how they can improve equitable educational outcomes for students. Partnering with the New Jersey Department of Education and partner districts and the Washington State Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction, AIR will conduct community asset mapping and needs assessments to inform the identification, implementation, scale-up, and study of promising practices that address and remedy the equity gap in chronic absenteeism rates. Each phase of the project will be informed by the perspectives, lived experiences, and needs of Black, Latino, and Indigenous students and their families.

Enhancing Public Safety and Policing

Evaluating and Increasing Justice in Public Safety and Policing Initiatives: High-Quality Evaluations and Evidence-Informed Technical Assistance Grant Competition

The AIR Equity Initiative has a deep commitment to justice in policing and public safety, which we view as essential to creating more equitable opportunities and outcomes in education, work, and health. Communities have long been calling for policymakers, police departments, and municipalities to reform the justice system and to reduce violence in general, and specific to policing.

This grant competition supports high-quality implementation and impact evaluations of initiatives that aim to redefine the relationship between law enforcement and communities; to redeploy resources; and to improve training, policies, laws, interventions, standards, and practices for promoting equitable and fair policing practices. Funded projects provide evaluation, research-informed technical assistance, and measures to aid public safety and harm-reduction efforts.
Justice in Public Safety and Policing Commissioned Work

Commissioned work in this area explores how data analytics can reduce harm and prevent unwarranted use of force in policing.

Justice in Public Safety and Policing—By The Numbers

- **6** GRANTS FUNDED
- **$17,338,120** TOTAL DOLLARS AWARDED
- **4** STATES
- **1 NATIONAL LEVEL** GEOGRAPHICAL REACH
- **4** NUMBER OF PARTNERS ENGAGED

An Expansion of the Evaluation of Oakland and Richmond’s Neighborhood Opportunity and Accountability Board

This project is generating evidence about the capacity and components of restorative justice diversion approaches to reduce racial inequity in the youth justice system and to improve student developmental outcomes, such as school performance and well-being. The study is examining a youth diversion program developed by the National Institute for Criminal Justice Reform’s Neighborhood Opportunity & Accountability Board. The board diverts youth to community- and strengths-based programming at the point of arrest. It is examining how core components are implemented in Oakland and Richmond, California, including participant referral experiences and diversion and educational outcomes. The project includes an implementation study, Youth Participatory Action Research, and an outcomes and impact study that includes a quasi-experimental design.

Partnerships to Advance Equity in Health Grant Competition

The Partnerships to Advance Equity in Health grant competition supports efforts to understand key underfunded issues in health that, when addressed, could contribute to more equitable health access and outcomes. Work funded through this grant competition contributes new insights into how multidisciplinary teams can be empowered to explore the ways various inequities in health intersect with community, work, and school. Findings from these projects, along with other exploratory work, will inform the content and trajectory of the AIR Equity Initiative’s future agenda to address health inequities, especially those that stem from being isolated from opportunities.
Health Equity Commissioned Work

To further inform a possible long-term funding agenda focused on health equity, the AIR Equity Initiative is supporting a place-based project that uses state-level multisector data to address determinants of health related to addiction.

Health Equity—By The Numbers

- **4** grants funded
- **$1,597,145** total dollars awarded
- **50** states
- **1** number of partners engaged

The Role of Medicaid Policy on Reducing Racial Disparities in Maternal Mortality and Other Maternal Health Outcomes

Medicaid plays a key role in providing maternity-related services for pregnant women, and potentially, in reducing racial disparities in maternal health. A mixed-methods research approach is identifying Medicaid policies that have been effective in reducing racial disparities in maternal mortality and other maternal health outcomes. Interviews and co-interpretation with stakeholders will inform on-the-ground evidence and actionable recommendations and the potential for a long-term agenda.

Workforce Development

We are supporting three awards to reduce barriers to workforce training by fostering collaborations that strengthen workforce systems and by scaling promising strategies from place-based, sectoral workforce development programs.
AIR Scholars and Leaders Awards Grant Competition

Building a nimble, skilled, diverse, and inclusive organization and culture is part of AIR’s 2024 strategic goals, and the Scholars and Leaders Awards is one way we are making progress.

The AIR Equity Initiative’s Scholars and Leaders Awards grant competition seeks to expand the diversity of staff who are leading research, technical assistance, and systems change at AIR. The awards assume that (a) additional ideas and skills are needed to address longstanding inequities, (b) demonstrating expertise through funded work will benefit career growth, and (c) focused funding opportunities, such as this one, will augment the steps already in place to strengthen diversity, equity, and inclusion at AIR. As part of our comprehensive diversity, equity, and inclusion strategy, the Scholars and Leaders Awards seek to create more inclusive thought and project leadership within each division at AIR.

The PROMISE Center: Promoting Resilience, Opportunity, and Mobility in Support of Equity

The PROMISE Center is committed to uncovering the most effective strategies, and the partnerships and conditions needed, to build a 21st century workforce development ecosystem that helps all people succeed and thrive. The center aims to inform wide-scale adoption and, perhaps, replication of evidence-based approaches to effective skill building, paired with policy and other reforms to restore opportunity and mobility for millions of underserved Americans. Projects conducted by the center are learning from and evolving successful sectoral programs to identify the training, technical assistance, evaluation support, and other resources that will be needed to bring new models to fruition.

Workforce Development—By The Numbers

- 3 grants funded
- 50 states
- $6,277,001 total dollars awarded
- 6 number of partners engaged
Our partnerships edify and enhance our work and the broader fields of research, technical assistance, and philanthropy. Through partnerships, we seek to elevate diverse perspectives, ensure the representation of youth voices in grant making, and increase diversity, equity, and inclusion in behavioral and social science research.
Pipeline Partnership Program

The AIR Pipeline Partnership Program (P3) seeks to address a persistent lack of racial and ethnic diversity in the behavioral and social science research fields. The program works with three universities that serve students from diverse backgrounds—Georgia State University in Atlanta; Howard University in Washington, D.C.; and the University of Texas at San Antonio. The partnership program collaborates with faculty and students to provide learning events, mentorships, and internships with leaders who conduct research, evaluation, and technical assistance projects. These efforts enable university graduate students, faculty, and AIR staff to diversify their professional networks, enrich research pursuits, and reinforce and extend skills that are relevant for research and technical assistance careers.

Pipeline Partnership Program—By The Numbers

STUDENTS SERVED

200+

GEOGRAPHICAL REACH: U.S.-BASED

2 STATES AND THE DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA

Pipeline Partnership Program ENGAGE Mentoring

One of the five components of the Program, P3 ENGAGE, promotes the success of graduate students from diverse and underrepresented groups by enhancing their connections with their peers and preeminent scholars who offer support and guidance as they navigate their doctoral programs and plan for their careers. In its first year, P3 ENGAGE matched 18 doctoral students with mentors drawn from AIR’s network of Institute Fellows, senior leaders, and preeminent scholars. The goal of P3 ENGAGE is to provide students with the opportunity to:

- Develop authentic relationships with leading scholars outside the student’s program of study.
- Explore opportunities to advance the integration of diversity, equity, inclusion, and cultural and linguistic competence as guiding principles within social and behavioral science research.
- Reflect and share experiences through meaningful conversations.
- Interact with expert scholars and receive feedback on research processes, methodologies, theories, and products.
- Learn about relevant resources related to their areas of research focus.
- Expand their professional network to facilitate career growth.
The American Youth Policy Consultants provide substantive support to the AIR Equity Initiative. Youth Policy Consultants review critical documents, provide input to Equity Initiative staff, and participate in focus groups to inform efforts to improve youth outcomes. The consultants are also developing ideas to address inequities in education, work, and human service systems and a podcast series to spur conversation and action on issues impacting the lives of youth in the United States.

**Credible Messengers Podcast Series**

Credible messengers are mentors whose lived experiences serve as a credential in their work to provide guidance, support, and encouragement to young people facing similar challenges. Credible messengers are unique mentors in that their lived experience serves to create even deeper trust, understanding, and partnership with the young people they serve. The American Youth Policy Forum Youth Policy Consultants developed the Credible Messenger Podcast to examine how well-trained, resourced, supported, and paid credible messengers can serve young people navigating the youth legal system, child welfare system, K–12 schools, or college. The Credible Messenger Podcast unpacks the term “credible messenger,” and through lived examples and exemplary research, illustrates the many ways credible messengers are already working or can be tapped to improve outcomes for young people, especially those marginalized by systemic inequities.
Engagement and Communication

The AIR Equity Initiative has extended the reach, impact, and shape of our work through communication and engagement activities that invite dialogue and encourage action. We have done this through three strategies:

- **The Bridges to Equity Roundtable Webinar Series** brings together experts and stakeholders to explore issues that contribute to inequities and viable solutions.

- **The “Follow Our Journey” Blog** explores the various aspects of the Equity Initiative’s work and offers perspectives and insights into our areas of focus.

- **Coffee Chats** are forums that bring AIR staff together to exchange ideas, learn from one another, and learn more about the Equity Initiative.
Equity Initiative Funded Grants

Improving Educational Experiences Grants

1. Campus Without Walls: An Innovative Approach to Implementing Massachusetts’ Equity Plan
   a. AIR Lead: Jingtong Pan
   b. Grant Amount: $1,758,828
   c. Project Period: March 31, 2022–December 31, 2025

2. Improving Attendance Policies Through the Equitable Attendance Policy Partnership
   a. AIR Leads: Kathy Terry and Jenny Scala
   b. Grant Amount: $1,210,018
   c. Project Period: March 31, 2022–February 28, 2026

   a. AIR Leads: Joshua R. Polanin and Sarah Peko-Spicer
   b. Grant Amount: $1,049,586
   c. Project Period: April 1, 2022–March 31, 2025

4. Indigenous Student Identification
   a. AIR Lead: Nara Nayar
   b. Grant Amount: $2,750,000
   c. Project Period: November 2022–October 2026

5. Promoting Equity Funding for Schools Facing Adverse Health Circumstances
   a. AIR Leads: Thomas Snyder and Lisa Yarnell
   b. Grant Amount: $750,000
   c. Project Period: September 1, 2022–January 31, 2025
6. Improving Pandemic Recovery Efforts in Education Agencies
   a. AIR Lead: Dan Goldhaber
   b. Grant Amount: $2,200,000
   c. Project Period: December 1, 2022–August 31, 2025

Sole-Source, Discretionary or Capacity Building Contracts and Grants, Commissioned Work

7. Bridges Collaborative Capacity Building Grant
   b. Grant Amount: $75,000
   c. Project Period: November 1, 2021–October 31, 2022

8. Bridges Collaborative Continuous Improvement Study
   a. AIR Leads: Megan Sambolt and Erica Shelton
   b. Grant Amount: $2,999,911
   c. Project Period: October 1, 2021–September 30, 2024

9. National Center for the Analysis of Longitudinal Data in Education Research (CALDER)
   a. AIR Lead: Dan Goldhaber
   b. Grant Amount: $1,499,700
   c. Project Period: January 1, 2021–December 31, 2023

Enhancing Public Safety and Policing Grants

10. An Evaluation of the Center for Policing Equity’s Strategic Partnerships Program
    a. AIR Leads: G. Roger Jarjoura and Amanda Latimore
    b. Grant Amount: $2,800,003
    c. Project Period: October 1, 2022–September 30, 2026

11. High-Quality Evaluations and Evidence-Informed Technical Assistance of the Institute for American Police Reform’s Community Engagement and Education Pillar
    a. AIR Leads: Anne Diffenderffer and Candace Hester
    b. Grant Amount: $2,606,927
    c. Project Period: October 1, 2022–March 31, 2026
12. An Expansion of the Evaluation of Oakland and Richmond’s Neighborhood Opportunity and Accountability Board  
   a. **AIR Leads:** Melissa Yisak and Candace Hester  
   b. **Grant Amount:** $2,107,821  
   c. **Project Period:** October 1, 2022–September 30, 2026

**Sole-Source, Discretionary or Capacity Building Contracts and Grants, Commissioned Work**

13. Benchmark Analytics Data Unpack Work Group  
   a. **AIR Lead:** Mary Ann Fox  
   b. **Grant Amount:** $124,741  
   c. **Project Period:** December 1, 2021–December 31, 2023

14. Benchmark Analytics Data Model Work Group  
   a. **AIR Lead:** Minh Huynh  
   b. **Grant Amount:** $2,918,216  
   c. **Project Period:** October 1, 2021–December 31, 2023

15. Benchmark Analytics Data Response Work Group  
   a. **AIR Lead:** Candace Hester  
   b. **Grant Amount:** $728,749  
   c. **Project Period:** October 1, 2021–December 31, 2023

16. Center for Policing Equity  
   a. **External Lead:** Dirk Butler, Center for Policing Equity  
   b. **Grant Amount:** $3,552,595  
   c. **Project Period:** January 3, 2022–May 15, 2024

17. Institute for American Police Reform  
   a. **External Lead:** Nicholas Sensley, Institute for American Police Reform  
   b. **Grant Amount:** $2,873,928  
   c. **Project Period:** September 1, 2022–March 1, 2024
Equity in Public Health Grants

18. The Role of Medicaid Policy on Reducing Racial Disparities in Maternal Mortality and Other Maternal Health Outcomes
   a. AIR Leads: Daniela Zapata and Sarah Pedersen
   b. Grant Amount: $685,000
   c. Project Period: January 1, 2022–February 29, 2024

19. The Impact of Health Professional Shortage Areas Designations on Primary Care Utilization and Outcomes Among Medicare Beneficiaries
   a. AIR Leads: Angshuman Gooptu and Taylor Melanson
   b. Grant Amount: $313,017
   c. Project Period: January 1, 2022–September 30, 2024

20. Understanding and Responding to Inequities in Access to, Utilization, and Quality of Medicaid Home and Community-Based Services
    a. AIR Leads: Aditi Pathak and Kelsey Walter
    b. Grant Amount: $499,393
    c. Project Period: January 1, 2022–December 31, 2023

Sole-Source, Discretionary or Capacity Building Contracts and Grants, Commissioned Work

21. Massachusetts Tackling Addiction Determinants of Health through Research
    a. AIR Lead: Amanda Latimore
    b. Grant Amount: $99,735
    c. Project Period: October 15, 2021–October 14, 2022

22. Global Commission on Evidence Use
    a. External Lead: Jenn Thornhill Verma
    b. Grant Amount: $35,000
Strengthening Workforce Development Grants

Sole-Source, Discretionary or Capacity Building Contracts and Grants, Commissioned Work

23. PROMISE Center and Inaugural Projects
   a. AIR Leads: Elizabeth Rutsch and Harry Holzer
   b. Grant Amount: $6,052,001
   c. Project Period: July 1, 2021–June 30, 2023

24. Northeastern-Boston Youth Employment Study
   a. External Lead: Alicia Modestino, Northeastern University
   b. Grant Amount: $225,000 (The Doris Duke Charitable Foundation and the William T. Grant Foundation also contributed funds for a total award of $650,000)
   c. Project Period: July 1, 2021–June 30, 2024

25. Workforce Matters
   a. External Lead: Loh-Sze Leung, Workforce Matters
   b. Grant Amount: $35,000
   c. Project Period: May 1, 2022–September 30, 2023

Increasing Diversity, Equity and Inclusion in Behavioral and Social Sciences Grants

26. Amplifying Women's Voices to Change Gender Norms: Evidence from the Democratic Republic of the Congo
   a. AIR Lead: Garima Siwach
   b. Grant Amount: $549,823
   c. Project Period: April 1, 2022–March 31, 2024

27. Evaluation of Oakland and Richmond's Neighborhood Opportunity and Accountability Board
   a. AIR Lead: Melissa Yisak
   b. Grant Amount: $549,896
   c. Project Period: July 1, 2022–June 30, 2024
28. Finding Robust Equity Solutions: Documenting and Addressing the Advanced Course Access Inequity Issue
   a. AIR Leads: Angelica Herrera (current); Jennifer Hudson (former)
   b. Grant Amount: $549,985
   c. Project Period: June 1, 2022–May 31, 2024

29. Health Equity for Afghan Refugees (HEAR): Generating and Using Evidence to Align Multi-Sector Organizations with the Priorities of Afghan Refugees
   a. AIR Leads: Maliha Ali and Trenita Childers
   b. Grant Amount: $549,964
   c. Project Period: March 1, 2022–February 29, 2024

30. Impacts of Inequities in Access to Language of Education on Educational Achievement: Evidence from India
   a. AIR Lead: Mauricio Estrada
   b. Grant Amount: $549,540
   c. Project Period: March 31, 2022–January 31, 2024

Sole-Source, Discretionary or Capacity Building Contracts and Grants, Commissioned Work

31. Pipeline Partnership Program
   a. AIR Leads: Karen Francis, Tracy Gray, Jillian Reynolds
   b. Grant Amount: N/A
   c. Project Period: 2020–Present

32. American Youth Policy Forum
   a. External Lead: Stephanie McGencey, American Youth Policy Forum
   b. Grant Amount: $108,000
   c. Project Period: September 1, 2021–December 31, 2022
Our Team

Karen Francis, VP, Chief DEI Officer, and Interim AIR Equity Initiative Director
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Nancy Lopez  David Takeuchi
Felicia Medellin  Jamila Taylor
Kyndra Middleton  Kathleen King Thorius
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Patsy Moskal  Jessica Vasan
Lisette Nieves  Alicia Wilson-Ahlstrom
Myra Parker  Lok-Sze Wong
Equity Initiative Event Presenters

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Monique Chism
Jameela Conway-Turner
Max Crowley
Jessica de Barros
Mary Ann Fox
Karen Francis
Arayle Freels
Alicia Garcia
Michael Garet
Dan Goldhaber
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About AIR

Established in 1946, the American Institutes for Research® (AIR®) is a nonpartisan, not-for-profit organization that conducts behavioral and social science research and delivers technical assistance both domestically and internationally in the areas of education, health, and the workforce. AIR’s work is driven by its mission to generate and use rigorous evidence that contributes to a better, more equitable world. With headquarters in Arlington, Virginia, AIR has offices across the U.S. and abroad. For more information, visit AIR.ORG.