



Use Blue Skies: Established Health Equity Offices' Strategies for Planning Ahead

The consequences of COVID-19 health inequities are so pervasive that it becomes hard for organizations to manage both short-term needs and long-term planning as they relate to advancing health equity and addressing social determinants of health. This session highlighted established Health Equity Offices that can address current needs while looking ahead through mitigation planning and policy making. Panelists discussed best practices for strategic visioning and adaptive leadership that will include items such as asset mapping, leveraging, and braiding funding resources, and integrating health equity at varying stages of the planning process.

What are “blue skies”?

- The times of administrative work and day-to-day service administration that occur between times of crisis (“gray sky” periods).
- Blue sky periods should ideally be used to build resilience for gray skies, through preparedness, prevention, mitigation, and coalition and capacity building.

Why are blue skies important to use and understand?

- Preparation and resilience building during blue skies can help both strengthen and reduce demand on systems during disasters.
- Initial disasters often make systems weaker during future disasters, but resilience building can counter this dynamic.

How can organizations use blue skies effectively?

There are many strategies that organizations can use, and they can be guided by the below three principles:

- **Resilience should be a way of adaptive living, not a response to an emergency:**
 - Building a culture of preparation through intentional practice.
 - Building equity into planning processes, not as an afterthought.
 - Knowing your community’s gaps and strengths through regular landscape mapping.
 - Strengthening your team’s understanding of their roles and responsibilities, particularly how they change during crises.
 - Developing, reviewing, and practicing hazard plans.
 - Disseminating up-to-date social service information.
 - Conducting geo-social planning to improve equity in action outcomes.
- **Plant seeds today for shades and fruit tomorrow:**
 - Building coalitions before you need them.
 - Acknowledging and leveraging existing resources.
 - Identifying opportunities to blend and braid funding.
 - Creating and managing databases to support building community capacity.
 - Reducing demand on response systems by referring to wraparound services.
 - Completing exercises, such as community action planning, to build community trust.

- **Resilience requires collaboration:**
 - Gathering a wide range of community partners.
 - Compensating and respecting community partners.
 - Maximizing and communicating the value-add of these coalitions for community members.
 - Prioritizing goals of creating resilient communities in this work.
 - Including traditional and non-Western approaches for mission-driven solutions.
 - Promoting cultural responsiveness in all aspects of this work.
 - Prioritizing transparent and accessible partner communication.
 - Shifting power and resources to communities and investing in communities.



Resources to learn from:

The below resources may be helpful starting points for health departments, but it is important to note that every community is different, so these resources may need to be adapted.

[Embedding Equity into Emergency Operations: Strategies for Local Health Departments During COVID-19 & Beyond](#)

A brief that provides health departments with a range of case studies, resources, and recommendations to embed equity practices into their emergency operations structures. The focus of this brief is largely on coalition building prior to crises.

[He 'A'ali'i Kū Makani Mai Au: Developing a Cultural Framework for Advancing COVID-19 Related, Community-informed Health Policies](#)

A peer-reviewed study that highlights how Native Hawaiian and Pacific Islander networks across the country mobilized to respond to COVID-19. This resource discusses how these responses largely centered on Indigenous Pacific-based cultural values, protocols, and practices.

[Local Government Approaches to Combating COVID-19 Inequities: A Durham County Department of Public Health Perspective](#)

A peer-reviewed case study of how the Durham County Department of Public Health operationalized equity into its COVID-19 response. The case study also discusses how the health department can work to center equity in future public health emergencies.

[Rice County Conducts Equity Analysis and Develops a Health Equity Plan](#)

A case study that outlines how Rice County Public Health implemented a tool to analyze health equity data and then used that data to improve its policies, practices, and strategic planning related to health equity.

[Sonoma County Department of Health Services: Health Equity Award Winner for a Medium County Practice](#)

A case study that discusses Sonoma County Department of Health Services' work before COVID-19 to create a framework to improve health disparities. The report particularly highlights the department's work to convene community partners.

This resource guide was supported by funds made available from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, Center for State, Tribal, Local and Territorial Support, through cooperative agreement OT18-1802, Strengthening Public Health Systems and Services Through National Partnerships to Improve and Protect the Nation's Health award #6 NU380T000303-04-02.



This resource guide was developed by:

Informing Strategy. Advancing Health.

