

# Together Toward Equity Fellowship | Impact Assessment

The **Together Toward Equity** (TTE) Fellowship has profoundly transformed the leadership journeys of its Fellows by providing essential opportunities to enhance their skills and engage in deep, critical reflection on the vital responsibilities and complex challenges of advancing equity within Public Health. Through a focused commitment to both learning and self-awareness, the program empowers Fellows to cultivate a richer, more nuanced understanding of how to champion and implement equitable practices across their organizations and communities.

Imagine a cohort of dedicated professionals, each bringing their unique experience and perspective, coming together to confront some of the most pressing equity issues in Public Health today. Their shared journey through the Fellowship not only refines their leadership skills but also fosters a profound sense of community and shared purpose, creating bonds that extend beyond the program itself.

In the face of a rapidly evolving social and political landscape since January 2025—marked by funding uncertainties, staffing shortages, and heightened stress and trauma among Public Health professionals—the importance of the Fellowship has only intensified. Organizations grappling with limited resources have felt increased strain, highlighting the urgent need for strong, adaptive leadership and comprehensive support during these demanding times. Through the Fellowship, these leaders gain tools and strategies that allow them to not only meet these challenges but also inspire resilience and innovation within their teams. They become beacons of hope and change, equipped to steer their organizations and communities toward a more equitable future.

Evaluation feedback from the 2025 cohort of Fellows (n=12), who completed the Foundational Leadership curriculum in Spring 2025, underscores the profound and lasting impact of the TTE Fellowship. Their reflections reveal that this transformative experience fosters significant personal and professional growth, building resilience and equipping Fellows to confidently navigate complexity and drive equity forward in their roles.

These narratives of growth and empowerment highlight how the TTE Fellowship is not just a program but a movement—one that nurtures leaders who are ready and able to enact meaningful change in Public Health equity for years to come.



## Fellowship Experience

The broader political and economic climate of instability, particularly in the public health field, has posed significant challenges to the Fellowship's long-term impact. Rising anti-DEI sentiment, changes in immigration policy, and financial cutbacks have created an environment of heightened uncertainty, which has disrupted the ability of organizations to maintain their focus on equity and community engagement.

**In response, the Fellowship has remained an essential avenue for Fellows to maintain community connection and foster resilience in the face of adversity.** Although external pressures have made it more difficult to implement DEI initiatives effectively, the Fellowship continues to support Fellows in navigating these challenges, ensuring that core values of advocacy, equity and solidarity remain at the forefront of their work.

*"Current federal and state policy changes have made it more difficult for our organization to engage with the community because they have created **an atmosphere of fear and uncertainty**. For many immigrant families in our region, shifting immigration and public health policies have led to hesitancy around participating in programs or following through with services, even when they are eligible... As a result, **we've had to spend more time building trust, providing accurate information, and reassuring community members before they feel comfortable engaging with us.**"*



## Fellowship Impact

### Fellowship Promotes Shift to Policy-Driven Advocacy

The shift in Fellows' understanding of policy and advocacy has had a lasting impact on both their personal leadership development and the broader communities they serve. Fellows began to approach challenges like housing, employment, and access to services not just as service delivery issues, but as opportunities for policy-driven, systems-level change. This reframing allowed them to integrate advocacy and equity into their daily work, making it a key driver of program development and organizational strategy.

As a result, Fellows became more engaged in policy discussions, both within their organizations and in their communities, advocating for long-term solutions and systemic change. Their increased confidence and ability to advocate effectively empowered them to bridge the gap between direct service work and broader policy impacts, demonstrating that meaningful advocacy can be embedded in everyday practices to create sustainable and equitable outcomes.

*"I've been able to implement key learnings from Policy and Advocacy by **approaching my work with a clearer understanding of how systems and decision-makers impact community outcomes.** One example is applying advocacy strategies to build relationships with elected officials—I felt more confident scheduling and preparing for meetings by leaning into curiosity and framing issues in ways that center community voices."*



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### Fellowship Deepens Leadership and Organizational Impact

The Fellowship had a meaningful impact on how Fellows lead and engage with their teams. Many Fellows described how they applied coaching skills, reflection tools, and equity-centered frameworks to create **more supportive, accountable, and mission-aligned** team cultures. A common theme was the development of stronger **communication, mentorship, and trust**, allowing Fellows and their colleagues to grow personally and professionally.

Fellows shared that their Fellowship experience significantly influenced their leadership approach, organizational strategy, and program development. Many Fellows described gaining the confidence and tools to **initiate new programming, advocate for changes in work culture**, and ensure that their efforts remain aligned with their organization's mission and community needs.

Many Fellows applied equity-centered frameworks and advocacy strategies to enhance the design and delivery of programs, particularly for underserved populations. Some noted tangible growth in their programs, such as increased funding and expanded capacity, directly tied to skills and insights gained through the Fellowship. The experience also empowered Fellows to **engage more intentionally in leadership**, from setting boundaries and mentoring staff to influencing decision-making. Additionally, the Fellowship served as a space for reflection, helping participants navigate complex challenges with greater clarity and purpose.

*"I've applied lessons from policy and advocacy sessions to better frame systemic barriers faced by justice-impacted people, which has **improved how we design programs and engage partners.** The coaching and reflection tools have also helped me **lead with more clarity and resilience**, directly impacting how I support staff and guide participants."*



## Fellowship Catalyzes Career Growth and Leadership Confidence

The Fellowship played a significant role in supporting Fellows' career growth, self-advocacy, and leadership confidence, even amid widespread organizational constraints such as funding cuts, hiring freezes, and layoffs. Several Fellows shared that the Fellowship helped them **recognize their value, advocate for raises** or professional development resources, and **explore career opportunities** beyond their current roles. Others noted a transformation in how they view themselves as leaders, with **increased confidence, courage, and clarity** about their mission, leadership style, and long-term goals. The coaching and tools provided were cited as key supports in preparing for greater responsibility and visibility in the field. For those facing limited advancement opportunities within their organizations, the Fellowship still served as a catalyst for reflection, motivation, and broader career planning. Despite setbacks such as layoffs, Fellows generally credited the Fellowship with strengthening their leadership identity and positioning them for future growth.

*"The Fellowship has strengthened my leadership capacity in ways that directly support career advancement. By **sharpening my skills** in policy advocacy, operations, and equity-centered leadership, I feel more prepared to **take on greater responsibility** both within my organization and across the broader movement. The network and visibility created through the Fellowship have also expanded opportunities for collaboration and positioned me for future leadership roles in the field."*

