Transforming Academia for EQUITY

AN INITIATIVE BY CHANGE MATRIX

SEVEN PRINCIPLES FOR EQUITY-CENTERED INSTITUTIONAL CHANGE:

Lessons from the Transforming Academia for Equity (TAE) Initiative

What happens when academic institutions are given the resources, support, and space to invite belonging and advance more equitable practices, policies, and programs? That is what the **Transforming Academia for Equity (TAE) Initiative** set out to learn.

Partnering with seven schools and programs of public health across the United States, the TAE Coordinating Center led by Change Matrix, supported TAE grantees to strengthen their capacity to lead equity-centered institutional change. Rather than promoting a one-size-fits-all approach or prescribing predetermined outcomes, TAE encouraged each institution to define what meaningful transformation looked like within its own context. The TAE Coordinating Center provided wraparound and tailored support for university-based guiding teams to learn, plan, collaborate, and adapt to changing conditions within their institutions and beyond.

What did we learn? Equity-centered, systemic, and cultural change within academic institutions is non-linear and layered, requiring sustained commitment over time. Lasting change is rooted in actively listening to your community, fostering belonging, inclusive engagement, and growing towards a shared purpose. There is no single or 'right' path to creating more equitable institutions. Rather, these seven principles offer building blocks for advancing equity-centered institutional change while creating conditions for continuous learning, adaptation, and progress.

Adaptive equity-centered change is a journey.



1 Meet Your Institutional Unit Where It Is and Build Forward

Every institution has a different history, culture, mission, and readiness for change. Begin by understanding the current context, identifying strengths, acknowledging barriers or failures, and then develop a strategic plan .

2 Invest Time in Relationships

Institutional change is driven by committed people and the deep relationships that connect them. Advancing equity in systems that resist change is hard and can lead to burnout, so investing in authentic relationships helps sustain change efforts

3 Create a Shared Purpose and Embrace Flexibility

Successful teams keep their shared purpose as a central focus while adapting strategies to changing conditions, such as removal of equity language or political pressures.

4 Share Leadership and Garner Broad Support

Sustained change requires shared ownership, so bring together students, faculty, staff, leaders, and community partners to make informed decisions and stay engaged

5 Create Structures That Support Learning and Adaptation

Build the scaffolding that supports continuous learning and forward momentum, rather than simply marking progress on tasks. Hold space and time for reflection, listening, and motivation as changing conditions reshape your shared vision of ‘success’.

6 Redefine What Progress Means

The most meaningful signs of change often appear long before major institutional milestones or outcomes are reached. Recognizing smaller shifts such as deepening trust, increased collaboration, and expanded leadership roles as progress helps teams see incremental progress and sustain momentum.

7 Institutionalize What Matters

Lasting change happens when equity becomes embedded in an institution's culture, operations, and investments. This means an equity lens shapes everyday thinking and decisions with visible leadership support, and policies, practices, programs, and strategic plans are intentionally designed to foster belonging and inclusion for everyone.

What now? The TAE initiative demonstrated that lasting institutional change is a journey - not a single program, policy or practice. It is an ongoing effort from committed individuals to build the relationships, structures, leadership, and learning capacity that allow equity to become part of how an institution operates. These principles are not intended to serve as a checklist or a prescribed roadmap. Rather, they offer a way of thinking about institutional change that recognizes complexity, embraces learning, and acknowledges that meaningful progress happens through relationships, shared leadership, intentional reflection, and sustained commitment. As TAE demonstrates, equity-centered change is most successful when institutions develop the capacity to continually respond to changing contexts while remaining grounded in a shared purpose.

Learn. Visit the **TAE website** to understand how the leading through change framework guided the TAE Coordinating Center and read about the experience of advancing equity from the grantee's point of view.

Reflect. Whether your institution is beginning this work, strengthening an existing initiative, or considering how to sustain long-term change, the **Reflection Guide for Adaptive Equity-Centered Change** provides a structure to build capacity. The guide expands upon the seven principles with reflection questions, practical strategies, and suggestions.

Connect. The TAE Coordinating Center now offers four FREE hours of consultation for anyone who is looking to advance equity, drive institutional change, and connect to other individuals and institutions implementing similar work. Grounded in the lessons learned through TAE, our team works alongside institutions to navigate challenges, strengthen existing efforts, and identify practical strategies that fit their unique context. **Tell us about yourself and your institution in our interest form.**

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