

Advancing Racial Equity through a Whole-of-Government Approach

Speaker Biographies

Rekha Balu is the director of federal equity initiatives and co-vice president of the Office of Race and Equity Research at the Urban Institute, where she leads research and policy programs that deploy analytics and evidence to inform federal agencies on how to advance equity. Balu joins Urban from MDRC, where she was a senior fellow and director of the Center for Applied Behavioral Science. She launched a portfolio of studies and designed interventions tackling challenges in human services, K-12 education, and the transition to postsecondary education. She has partnered with federal agencies and grantees around the country to help them base their decisions on data and evidence. In 2019, as a fellow with the Office of Evaluation Sciences in the US General Services Administration, she developed trainings, intervention designs, and field trials for federal agencies. She has an undergraduate degree from Northwestern University, a master of education degree from the Harvard Graduate School of Education, and a master's degree in economics from Stanford University. She earned her doctorate in the economics of education from Stanford University.

Maya Duru is a Fellow at the Office of Evaluation Sciences in the U.S. General Services Administration. Maya has an interest in poverty alleviation programs and equity. She has designed interventions to evaluate programs for nonprofits and governments that are focused on improving food security, labor, and governance outcomes. In her research, Maya uses a variety of methods including lab, online, and field experiments as well as focus group discussions and in-depth interviews. Maya aims to support junior researchers by developing education and research resources. She also actively works to promote research transparency. Prior to her fellowship at OES, Maya was the Associate Director of Education at J-PAL where she directed the MITx MicroMasters program in Data, Economics, and Development Policy (DEDP) as well as the MIT Economics Department's associated Master's program.

Alfredo Hernandez is the Director of Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion at the Michigan Department of Civil Rights. Alfredo Hernandez was born and raised in Panama. He moved to the United States in 1990 after graduating from high school and joined the US ARMY at the age of twenty. He spent 5 years stationed in Hawaii before moving to Illinois in 1997 and Michigan in 1998. Alfredo obtained a bachelor's degree in Liberal Studies with a minor in Philosophy at Grand Valley State University where his work, Language, Culture, Perception and Knowledge, was published in the McNair Scholar Journal. He pursued his graduate studies at Western Michigan University where he earned a master's degree in Comparative Religion. Alfredo was a McNair Scholar and Thurgood Marshall Fellowship Recipient. Alfredo has worked in the field of equity for numerous years developing inclusive strategies for organizational change; he has taught college courses in philosophy of religion and cultural anthropology and he currently serves as the Director of Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion for the Michigan Department of Civil Rights.

Namita Mody is the Director of the Council Office of Racial Equity (CORE), an office of the Council of the District of Columbia. Before being named Director, Nami served as CORE's Associate Director of Policy and Systems since the team's launch in 2021. Before joining CORE, Nami was a member of The Lab @ DC, an applied research team in DC Government. There, Nami worked on housing and homelessness projects and supported District agencies in asking questions, testing policies, and improving how they served residents. Nami has also spent time running national volunteer campaigns for young people, managing tech

and data products for a nonprofit, working on gun violence in Detroit, and researching best practices to release open data. Nami earned her Bachelor of Science in Business Economics from New York University and her Master in Public Policy from Harvard University's Kennedy School of Government, concentrating in social and urban policy.

Heather Jue Northover is a Principal Analyst in the County of Los Angeles Chief Executive Office as part of the Anti-Racism, Diversity, and Inclusion Initiative. Heather formerly directed the Center for Health Equity led by the County's Department of Public Health (DPH). She has also served as Chief of Staff to the Chief Deputy Director, Special Assistant to the Director, and in multiple capacities within the Division of HIV & STD Programs at DPH. Prior to joining County in 2005, her professional focus was on adolescent and sexual health while working in hospital, school, and community settings. Ms. Northover has a Bachelor of Arts in English with a minor in classic civilization from University of California, Los Angeles and a Master of Public Health in community health from New York University. She completed a fellowship with the Health Equity Awakened Leadership Institute sponsored by Human Impact Partners in 2017-2018.

Brion Oaks is first ever Chief Equity Officer for the City of Austin. In this capacity, Mr. Oaks is responsible for working with city leadership and the community to create an equity framework to be adopted by all departments and offices of Austin city government. As Chief Equity Officer, Oaks is responsible for facilitating dialogue and organizational practices that support the development and adoption of equity as a shared value. He serves as the technical expert in addressing equity as it is applied to city wide policies, programs, practices and budget decisions with an overall vision to make Austin the most livable city for ALL. Prior to his arrival to the City of Austin, Oaks served as the Vice President of Health Equity for fourteen years at the American Heart Association's Southwest Affiliate. In this capacity he oversaw the affiliate's department that was dedicated to improving cardiovascular health for our most vulnerable populations and reducing racial disparities in the prevention and treatment of cardiovascular disease. Mr. Oaks had a celebrated career at the American Heart Association. He was the 2009 recipient of the "Rome Betts in Health Equity" award and in 2010 received another prominent honor being recognized as a recipient of the national Cass Wheeler Integration award to recognize his work in collaboration and integration across the American Heart Association. Mr. Oaks earned his Bachelor of Science in Political Science from University of Houston and Masters of Public Administration from Texas State University. Prior to a 14-year career at the American Heart Association, Oaks worked as a legislative assistant for state Rep. Dora Olivo, D-Rosenberg, and as a project coordinator for the Texas Healthy Kids Corporation and the Texas Medical Foundation.

Kimberlyn Leary is a senior vice president, managing research and program development across the Urban Institute. She comes to Urban from Harvard University, where she is an associate professor of psychology at Harvard Medical School, an associate professor in the department of health policy and management at the Harvard T.H. Chan School of Public Health, and a lecturer in public policy at the Harvard Kennedy School. For four years, she directed the Enabling Change program for the Doctor of Public Health program at the Harvard T.H. Chan School of Public Health. Leary also served as executive director of policy outreach and of the Center of Excellence in Women's Mental Health at McLean Hospital. Before that, she was chief psychologist at the Cambridge Health Alliance for nearly 12 years. Leary served as an advisor to the White House during the Obama administration. As a Robert Wood Johnson health policy fellow, she helped launch the Advancing Equity initiative for the Obama White House Council on Women and Girls. She was also an advisor to the health division at White House Office of Management and Budget and senior policy advisor to the Office of National Drug Control Policy. Leary served on the Biden-Harris transition as a volunteer part-time member of the Agency Review Team for the Office of National Drug Control Policy in the Executive Office of the President.