

Using Data to Advance Racial Equity in Local Communities

Speaker Biographies

Leicester Johnson is the Chief Executive Officer of Academy of Hope (AoH). She is a visionary leader and social change champion who brings more than 25 years of experience in nonprofit management, education, and advocacy. She has been at the forefront of advancing equitable and inclusive solutions for communities that have been historically underserved. Johnson is a builder with deep knowledge of human development, adult literacy, and workforce training. She is a seasoned strategist and practitioner who expertly drives community-centered solutions that promote more just and impactful outcomes. She has been credited with creating and advocating for programs and services that measurably transformed lives throughout her career. As a founding member and former chair of the DC Adult and Family Literacy Coalition, Johnson led the coalition to achieve significant legislative wins for adults with low literacy. Whether engaging with philanthropists or community leaders, elected officials, or the individuals most affected, Johnson has a gift for forging strategic partnerships and uniting stakeholders around the common purpose of achieving sustainable change. In 2006, Johnson was appointed Chief Executive Officer of AoH, an adult education provider in Washington, DC. Under her stewardship, AoH expanded its footprint to a second campus, transitioned to an adult public charter school, expanded its workforce programming to include healthcare and an IT Academy, tripled its staff, and increased its annual revenue from \$650,000 to over \$9 million annually. Today AoH serves more than 500 learners from across the District of Columbia and recently launched the AoH Foundation to support the school through graduate services, research and evaluation, and eventually a teacher training institute. AoH has supported thousands of DC residents helping them to improve their literacy and numeracy skills, earn high school diplomas, complete college, and pursue fulfilling career pathways. Born in Birmingham, Alabama, Johnson views racial justice and civil rights as integral to her vocation and her personal value system. She has proudly called the Washington area home for nearly 30 years and has been recognized for her many contributions, with honors including the Amtrak Pioneer Award, the Dick Omang Award for Best Practices in Vocational Evaluation, Georgetown University's John Thompson Jr. Legacy of a Dream Award, the Meyer Foundation's Exponent Award, the Bradt Nonprofit Leadership Award from the Greater Washington Community Foundation and most recently she was a finalist for the 2022 1954 Luminary Award for Education by the Cleveland Avenue Foundation for Education Group. Johnson holds Master's and Ed.S degrees from George Washington University and a bachelor's from Grambling State University.

Faith Mitchell is an Institute fellow at the Urban Institute working with the Center on Nonprofits and Philanthropy and the Health Policy Center. She is also developing Urban's American Transformation project, which will look at the implications—and possibilities—of this country's racial and ethnic evolution. Over several decades, her career has bridged research, practice, and social and health policy. Previously, Mitchell was president and CEO of Grantmakers In Health, a DC-based national organization that advises, informs, and supports the work of health foundations and corporate giving programs. Before that, she held leadership positions at the National Academies (National Research Council and Institute of Medicine), the US Department of State, the William and Flora Hewlett Foundation, and the San Francisco Foundation. Mitchell has a doctorate in medical anthropology from the University of California, Berkeley. She has

written or edited numerous policy-related publications and is the author of *Hoodoo Medicine*, a groundbreaking study of Black folk medicine, and *The Book of Secrets, Part 1*, a semifactual supernatural thriller. She cochairs the advisory group for the John A. Hartford Foundation and Institute for Healthcare Improvement's Age-Friendly Health Systems initiative and serves on the advisory committee of the National Collaborative for Health Equity, the editorial board of *Health Affairs*, and the boards of directors of Community Wealth Partners and The Jacob & Valeria Langeloth Foundation.

Kathryn Pettit is a principal research associate in the Metropolitan Housing and Communities Policy Center at the Urban Institute, where her research focuses on neighborhood change and how communities use data for more effective and equitable decisionmaking. She is currently serving as the Interim Vice President leading the Center on Nonprofits and Philanthropy. Pettit is a recognized expert on several small-area local and national data sources and on the use of neighborhood data in research, policymaking, and program development. She has conducted research on many topics, including neighborhood redevelopment, federally assisted housing, and local housing markets and conditions. Pettit directs the National Neighborhood Indicators Partnership, a network of three dozen local organizations that collect, organize, and use neighborhood data to inform local advocacy and decisionmaking. She frequently presents the model and accomplishments of the network and local partners. She has produced two books on the role of data in community change: *Strengthening Communities for Neighborhood Data* and *What Counts: Harnessing Data for America's Communities*. Before assuming her current position, Pettit worked in Urban's Center on Nonprofits and Philanthropy, where she analyzed Internal Revenue Service data on nonprofit organizations. Pettit earned her bachelor's degree in international affairs and humanities and her master's degree in public policy from Georgetown University.

Nathaniel Smith is the founder and chief equity officer of Partnership for Southern Equity (PSE). A native son of Atlanta Georgia, Smith has been passionate about racial equity from the very beginning. As the child of Southern Freedom Movement Activists, his experiences observing many of the historical injustices and inequalities placed on people from underserved communities was the driving motivation to create a platform that would not only expose these inequities, but also bring the issue of racial equity to a larger scale, bring together groups and individuals to develop real solutions, and address these inequities in our communities so prosperity can be created and shared by all. In founding PSE, and as its Chief Equity Officer, Smith works to advance racial equity through an equity agenda, which advances just outcomes that are sensitive to the needs and circumstances of communities – erasing the barriers that stand in the way of success to create the conditions that enable just and fair inclusion into a society in which all people can participate, prosper and reach their full potential. As a leader, Smith's philosophy is to put individuals and communities first. While very deliberate about "moving the needle" when it comes to racial equity, he is a consensus builder and a strong believer in a transparency of process that moves at the speed of trust. This fundamental philosophy has transformed PSE into the premier organization in the country that focuses solely on racial equity, through its portfolios of Just Energy, Just Growth, Just Health, Just Opportunity, Just Solutions, and frontline community organizers who build the civic bench strength for advancing racial equity. Under Smith's leadership, PSE created the South's first equity-mapping tool, the Metro Atlanta Equity Atlas (now the Metro Atlanta Racial Equity Atlas), and led a coalition of diverse stakeholders to support a \$13 million transit referendum that expanded MARTA into a new county for the first time in 45 years. PSE continues to support the racial equity ecosystem through the COVID-19 pandemic through its COVID-19 Rapid Relief Fund, which distributed more than \$500,000 to more than 30 organizations because of the initial investment of the Community Foundation for Greater Atlanta and the United Way of Greater Atlanta. Smith's leadership was instrumental in partnering with several organizations to create the Justice40 Accelerator, designed to provide organizations with innovative front-line community climate projects the assistance to better position them to pursue and win federal funding, and to hold accountable

the Biden-Harris Administration’s executive order to direct 40% of federal climate action funds to disadvantaged communities. Smith’s accomplishments as a racial equity champion throughout the American South has earned him numerous awards and distinctions, including being named to the Grist 50 by Grist Magazine in 2018 and the Atlanta 500 by Atlanta Magazine 2019-2021 and designated one of the 100 “Most Influential Georgians” by Georgia Trend magazine 2018-2021. His recent accomplishments include being named an inaugural recipient of Bank of America’s Neighborhood Builders: Racial Equality award, and being named co-chair of the Drawdown Georgia Leadership Council, which addresses climate change in Georgia through the intersection of climate and equity. He was also honored by the Georgia House of Representatives with a special proclamation recognizing his tireless efforts toward advancing racial equity. Smith’s work has been featured in numerous publications, including U.S. News and World Report, Chronicle of Philanthropy, where he was named one of “15 People Changing the Nonprofit World”, Nonprofit Quarterly, Atlanta Magazine, where he was named one of “Atlanta’s Power 500”, The Hill, Christian Science Monitor, Atlanta Journal-Constitution, Atlanta Voice and many others.

Tené Traylor is the vice president of Urban Institute’s Center on Nonprofits and Philanthropy. Traylor brings national expertise in place-based philanthropy, equity, and civic leadership, particularly in the South, where she has honed a distinguished career in the nonprofit and philanthropic sector. She joined Urban after concluding her tenure at The Kendeda Fund, where she oversees several grantmaking portfolios totaling approximately \$8 million annually. Before joining Kendeda, Traylor was a senior program officer at the Community Foundation for Greater Atlanta. She led community development and neighborhood transformation grantmaking (including the Neighborhood Fund) for 10 years, launched several related programs and initiatives, and helped transform the foundation’s grantmaking approach from programmatic to general or core support. She has also held positions with the United Way for Greater Atlanta and the Zeist Foundation, Inc. Traylor holds a bachelor’s degree in political science from Georgia State University and a master of public administration degree in public policy and nonprofit administration from the University of Georgia.