

Beyond Equity:

Unpacking Targeted Universalism

DATE

March 8, 2023

PRESENTER

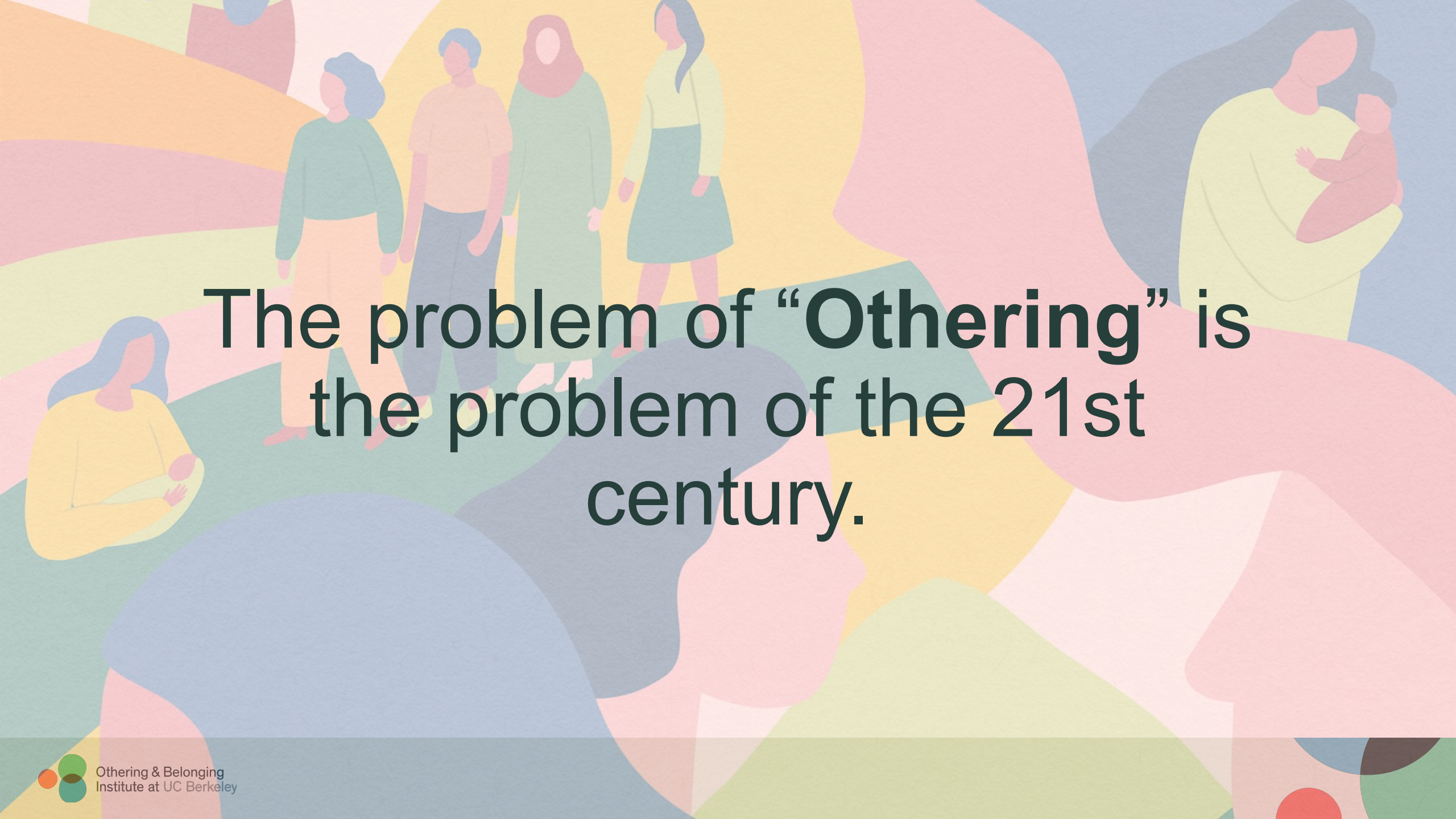
john a. powell, Director
Othering & Belonging
Institute

AUTHORIAL SUPPORT

Othering & Belonging
Institute

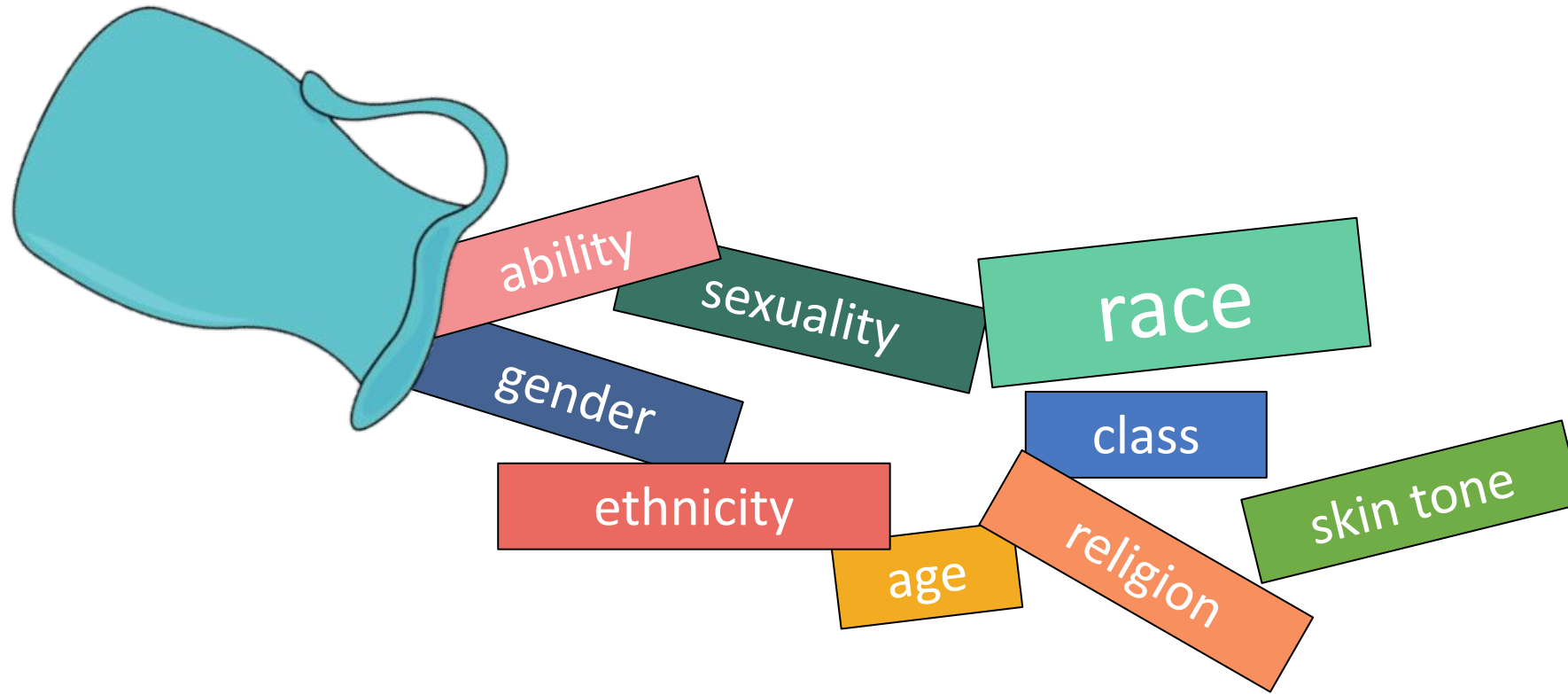
Othering and Belonging

*What is the ambition of Targeted
Universalism (T/U)?*

The background is a vibrant, abstract composition of overlapping organic shapes in shades of yellow, orange, pink, blue, and green. Stylized, flat-colored figures of people are scattered throughout. In the upper left, a group of four people stands together. In the upper right, a figure holds a child. In the lower left, another figure is seated, holding a child. The overall style is modern and artistic, emphasizing human diversity and community.

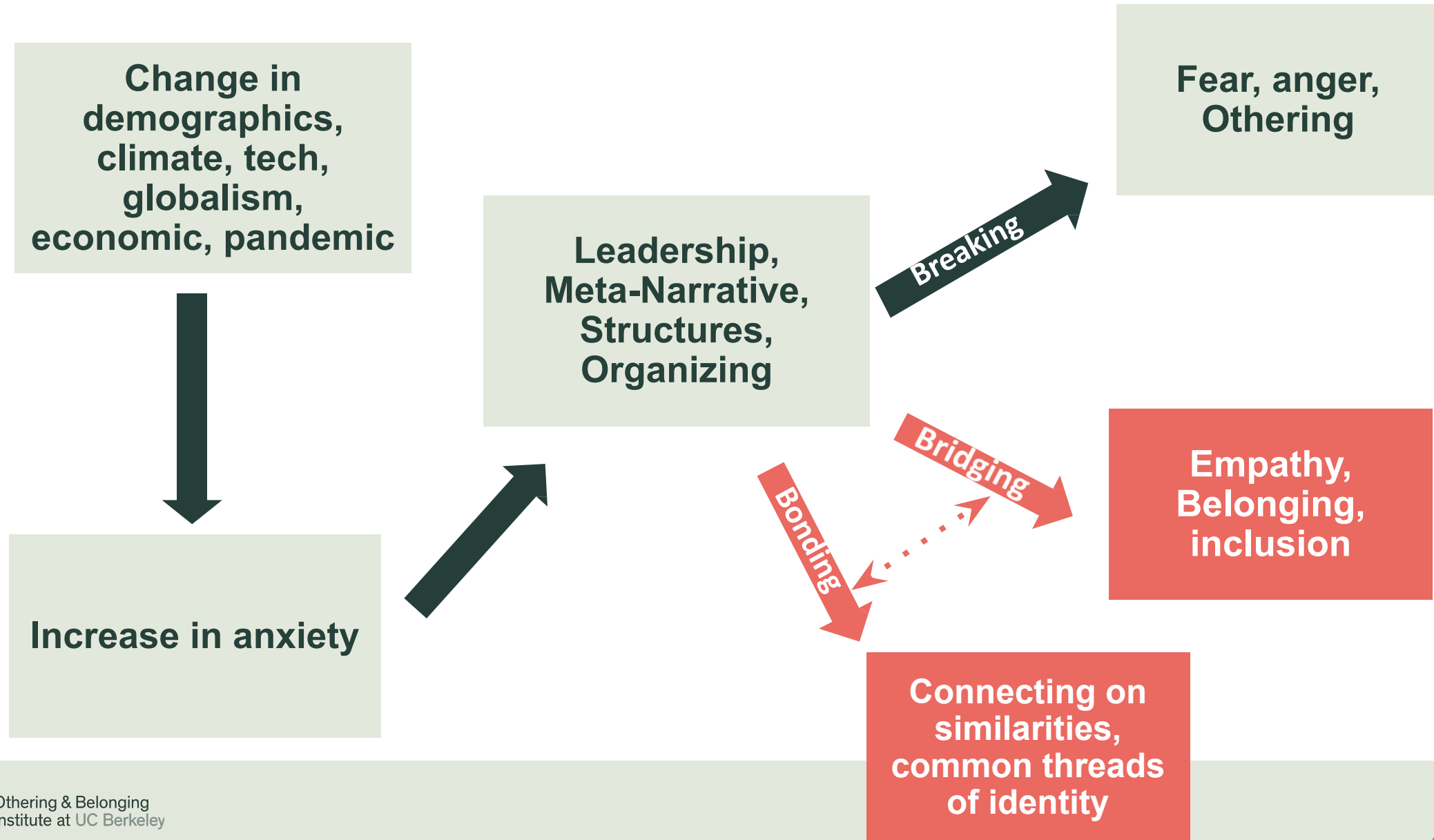
The problem of “**Othering**” is
the problem of the 21st
century.





Othering is a generalized set of common processes that engender marginality and group-based inequality across any of the full range of human differences

Situated in anxiety and polarization



Narratives of Othering and Belonging



Breaking: When a group turns inwards and explicitly pushes away from other groups who are seen as dangerous or a threat



Bonding: Connecting to people like you in some important way

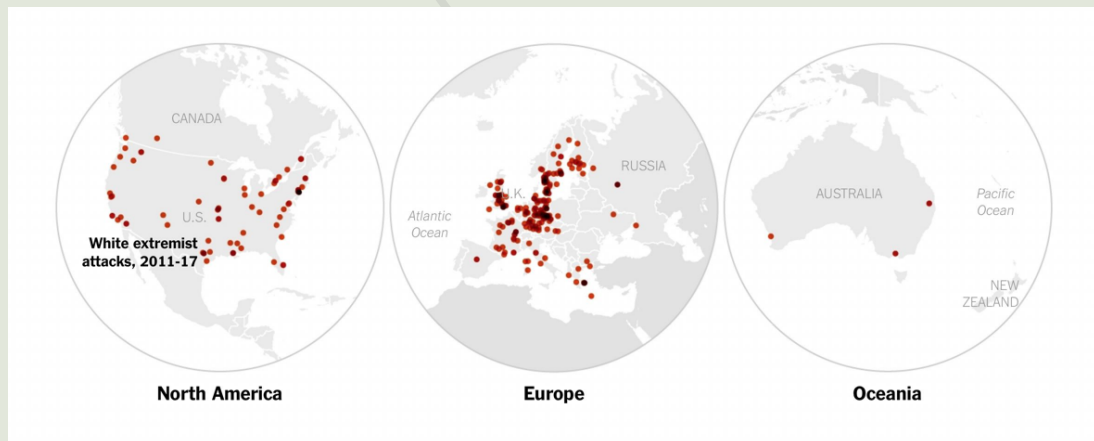


Bridging: Ties to people who are unlike you in some important way; stories, structure contact

Examples of breaking:



WHITE NATIONALISM



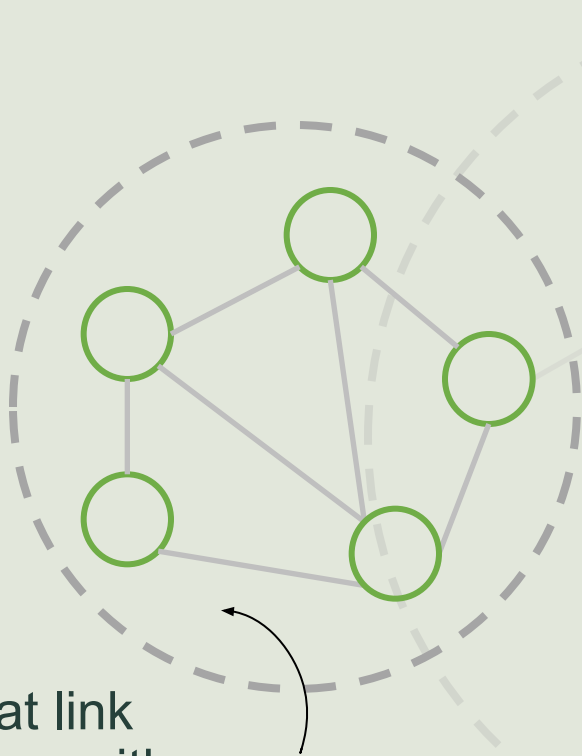
BREAKING:

Social ties among an exclusive group who explicitly push away from other groups who are seen as dangerous or a threat.

PROGRESSIVE INFIGHTING



Examples of bonding:



BONDING:

Social ties that link people together with others who are primarily like them along some key dimension. These are genuinely easier to build than bridging social capital.

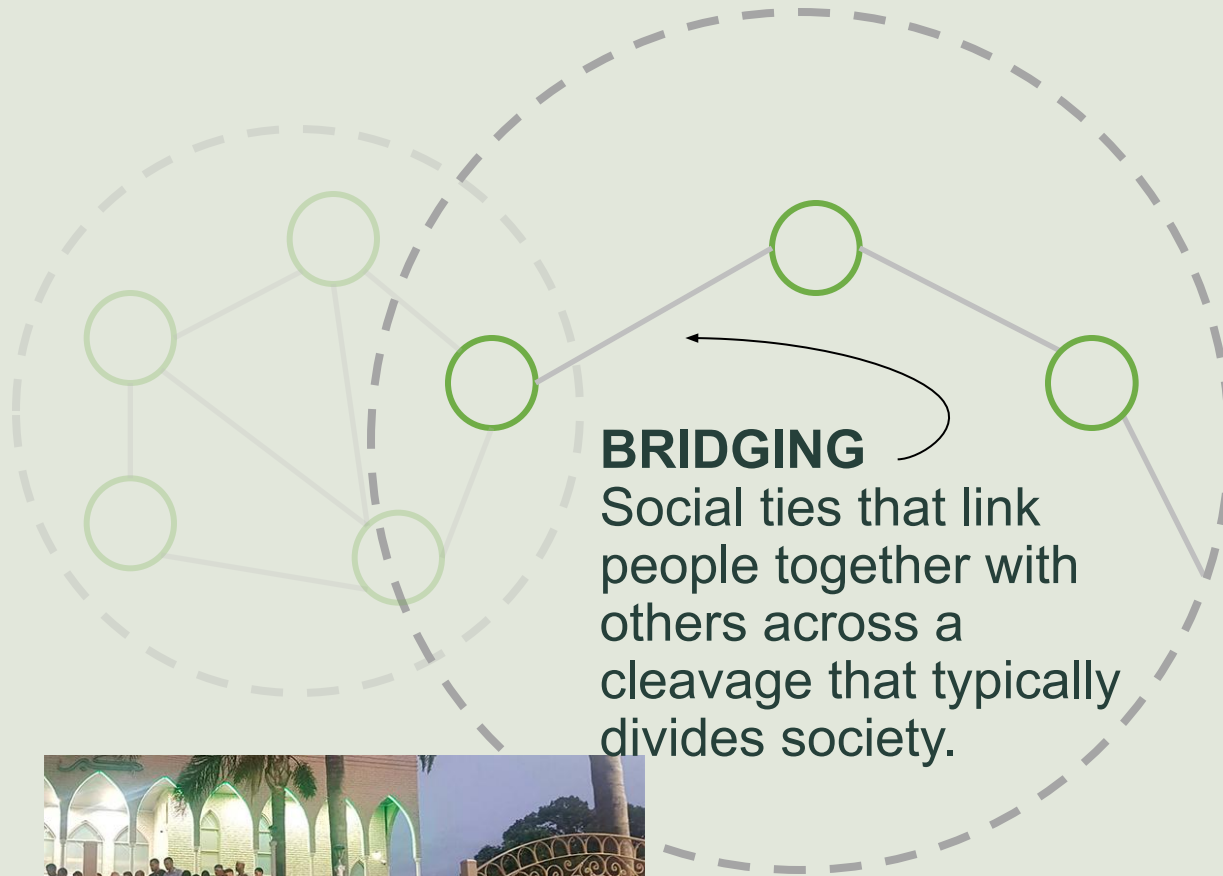


FAMILY



NEIGHBORHOOD

Examples of bridging:



LGBT



MOSQUE IN NEW ZEALAND

Bridging happens not only between individuals, but between groups and institutions as well

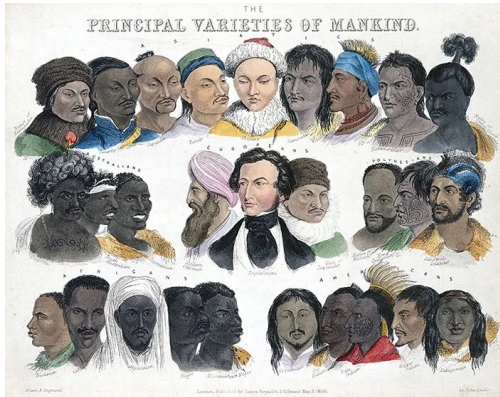


- Bridging expands the circle of human concern, builds a more inclusive “we”
- Bridging is not same-ing
- It contains multitudes
 - Short vs long
 - Weak vs strong
 - Transactional vs transformational
 - Across elevations

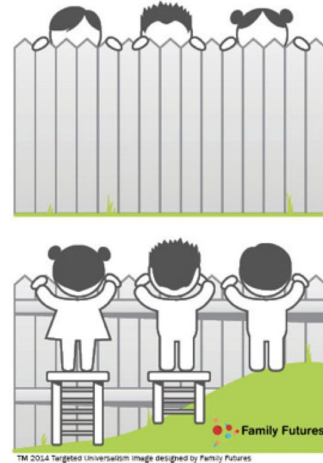
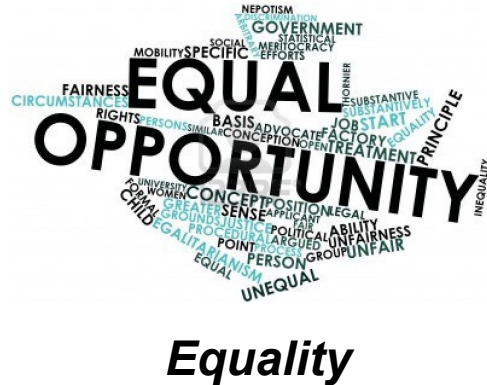
Differentiating approaches

Disparities, equity, and T/U (Equity 2.0)

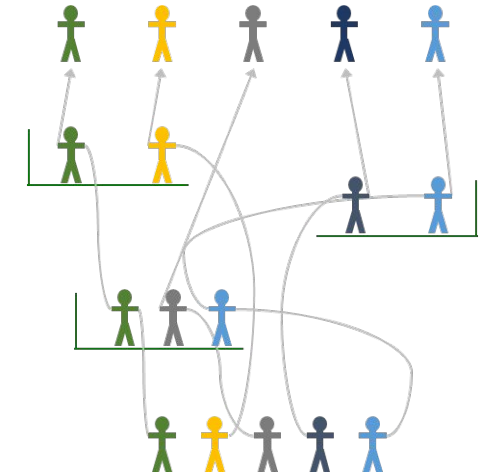
A Progression in How We Address Structural Inequality



Extreme Inequality



Equity



Targeted Universalism and Belonging (Equity 2.0)

Equity backlash

Opinion: Ben Carson: Moving our focus from equality to equity won't defeat racism. It's another kind of racism.

OPINION | COMMENTARY

'Equity' Is a Mandate to Discriminate

The new buzzword tries to hide the aim of throwing out the American principle of equality under the law.

By Charles Lipson
March 4, 2021 6:41 pm ET

CULTURE

How Equity Will Destroy America

Equity and equal opportunity are fundamentally incompatible.

Seattle Public Schools promises to be
"laser-focused" on student achievement in
2022-2023 — so long as the student is black.

"The district is hyper-focused on race, an approach that started in 2019. SPS intentionally separates students by race, adopting a philosophy of "targeted universalism," which argues that if you treat everyone equally, it might deepen inequality between groups. The district's new [\\$1.14 billion budget](#), introduced last week and up for a vote on July 6, is built to bolster its three race-based goals. Each one is centered around black boys. ..."

Disparities & equity can be a breaking framework

- **Can Cause or Deepen Breaking**

Competition for resources, especially if exclusively focused on marginalized group, deepen cleavages that inhibit movement building

- **Can obscure meaningful change**

How do we bridge in a polarized environment?

- Fragmentation is the dissolution over time of audience news exposure, public affairs knowledge, and political beliefs into smaller units in a society.
- Polarization can be thought of, in part, as a specific form of fragmentation.



Why Targeted Universalism?

People are differently situated

Not only are people situated differently with regard to institutions, people are situated differently with regard to infrastructure



People are impacted by the relationships between institutions and systems

...but people also impact these relationships and can change the structure of the system.

We are situated based on:

- **Race**
 - E.g. poor Blacks and poor whites are not situated the same in the affordable housing context, because poor Blacks face additional discrimination
- **Ability status**
 - E.g. students of color with disabilities are situated differently than students of color without disabilities in the context of criminalization of school discipline
- **Geography**
 - E.g. a middle-income person living in a poor neighborhood is situated differently than a middle-income person living in a middle-income neighborhood
- **And many other factors**

Power impacts bridging

- Bridging work must consider power differentials and the structural conditions within which bridging happens
- Those with more power should carry more of the weight of bridging, and yet the less powerful are often called upon
- Leaders can help redistribute power to foster belonging

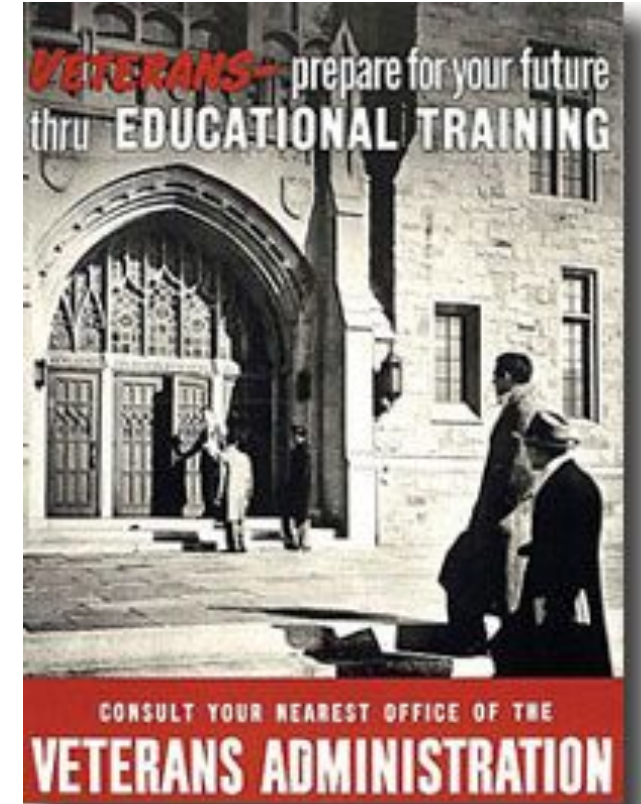
Cracked containers

- When there's a crack in the container--when the context in which we live is broken-- everyone feels othered and our solutions need to be more radical.
- Leaders can help create a container where we all belong.



Targeted Approaches

- Targeted policies are those that **extend benefits or protections to a targeted group**, and not to individuals outside of that group.
- Examples:
 - Social Security Old Age Benefits
 - SNAP
 - Affirmative Action
 - Veterans Benefits (The GI Bill)
 - Medicare/Medicaid
- Targeted policies may be less expensive (consider Medicare for all v. public option), but by targeting a particular group, these approaches are **often viewed as unfairly helping one group over another**, seeding hostility and resentment.



Universal Approaches

Political durability

- government 'not siding' with one group over another
 - minimum wage, universal health care

Criticism of unwarranted government spending

- 2013 Pres. Obama universal pre-K program, projected \$12.3 billion each year

Exacerbate disparities and deepen inequality and injustice by pursuing a normative target

- Massachusetts' 2006 statewide universal health care law
- 95% of residents obtained health care insurance (84% national average)
- Health care insurance provision did not translate into access to health care



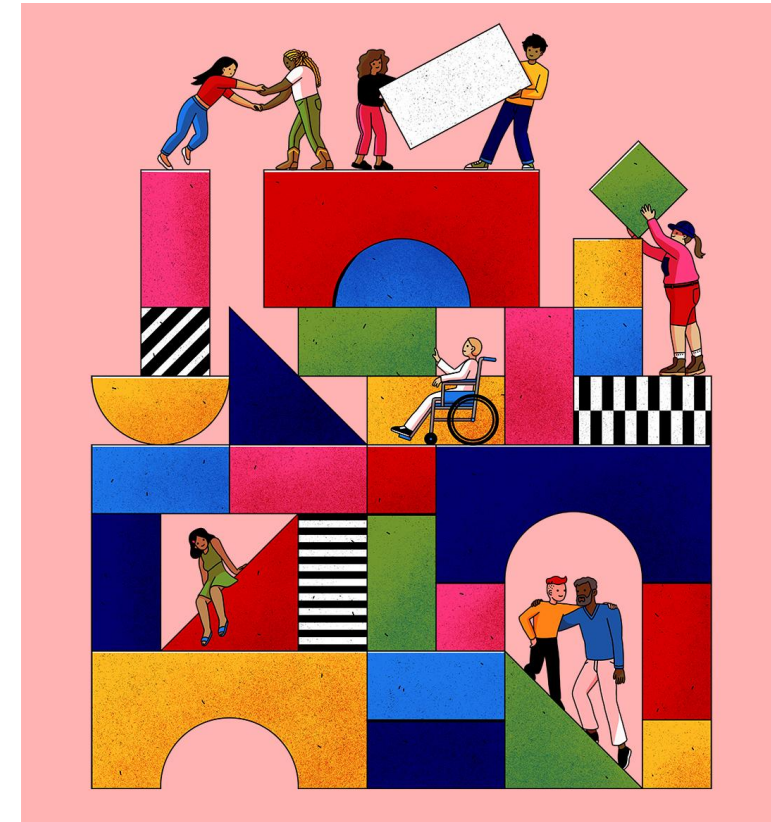
Targeted Universalism

This is an approach that supports the **needs of the particular(s)** while reminding us that we are all **part of the same social fabric**.

- How does T/U respond to the particular(s) suffering of groups?
- Does T/U diminish the role of particular groups?

Targeted universalism **rejects a blanket universal** which is likely to be indifferent to the reality that different groups are situated differently relative to the institutions and resources of society.

It also **rejects the claim of formal equality** that would treat all people the same as a way of denying difference.

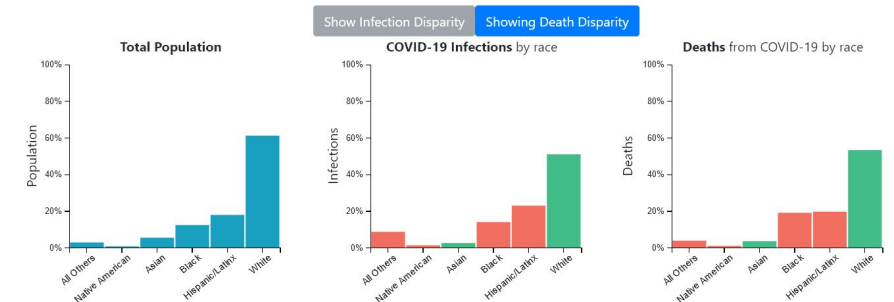
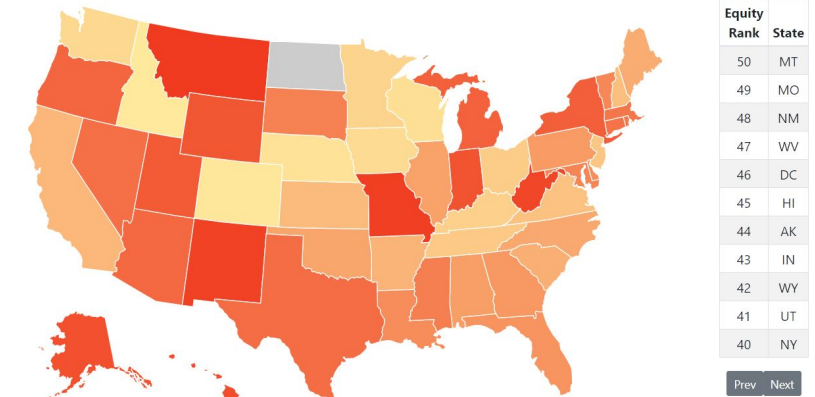


COVID-19: A Universal Problem with Targeted Consequences

No one is immune to the coronavirus, but **some of us are more susceptible** to infection. And unless we have policies that take care of every one of us, we all remain in danger. ...But the crisis is not a contest over who is most vulnerable. **To focus exclusively on the most at-risk groups and neglect everyone else misses the point.** Everyone is affected by the coronavirus, but in dramatically different ways.

In this case, the universal approach could be likened to Governor Cuomo's “**great equalizer**” narrative that neglects the disparities in how different populations are experiencing the crisis in terms of susceptibility to infection and access to treatment. Meanwhile a **targeted approach which focuses exclusively on at-risk groups falls short by neglecting people who are not as dramatically harmed as others, but who also need care.**

The response to this crisis must therefore take another approach in the form of targeted universalism. This approach **accounts for nuances of how different groups are being affected by the pandemic to create policy that targets each group based on their particular needs, while also remembering that we're all in this together.**



Targeted Universalism designs structures of belonging and tracking progress

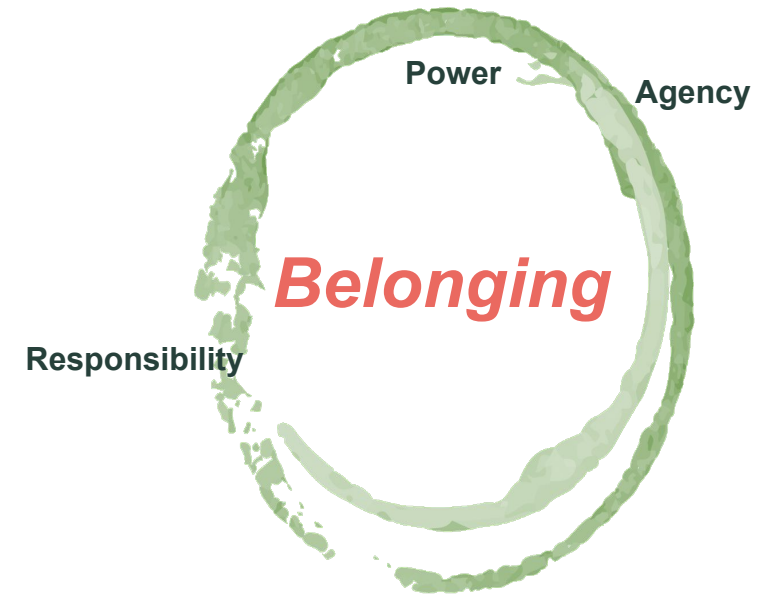
The **universal goal sets an aspiration** from which “everyone” stands to benefit

The **strategies in T/U are targeted**—not universal—and they are targeted to structures.

T/U is fixated on structures (**situatedness**) & **outcomes** (impacts of structural changes).

We are all positioned within some of the same institution, systems, and structures. (For example, think of the institution of family, educational and employment systems, health systems, and institutions of government)

Yet we **experience structures and systems in profoundly different ways** based on a variety of factors. We are situated differently and this experience **centers T/U structural analysis & defining the problem.**

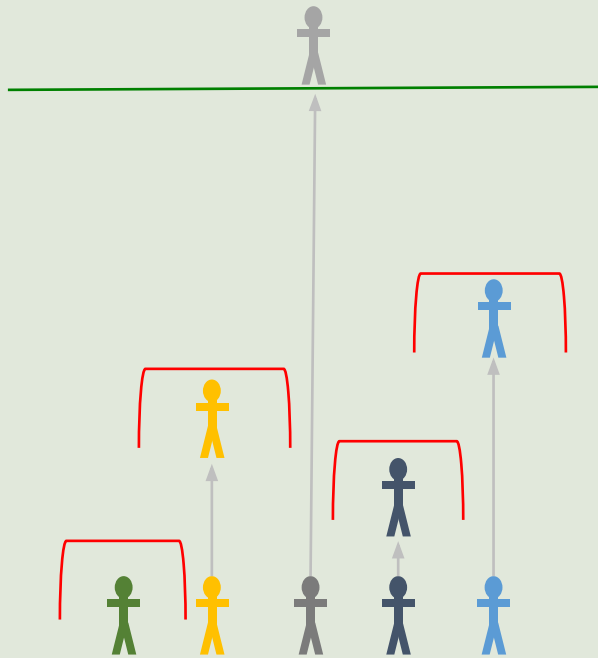


Components of T/U

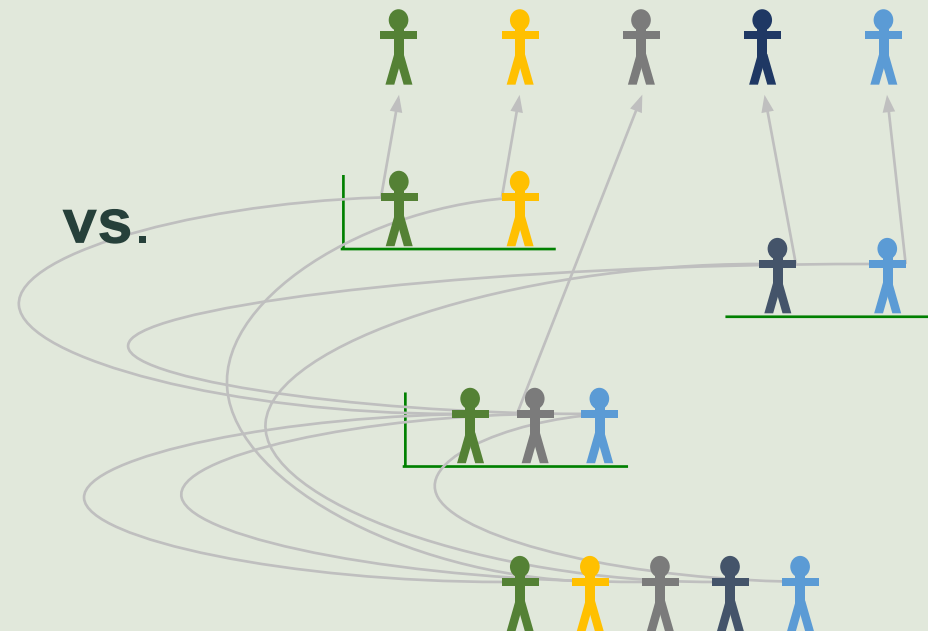


The T/U Framework

Structural inequity produces consistently different outcomes for different communities



Targeted universalism responds with universal goals and targeted solutions



Targeted Universalism Steps

1. **Co-create a universal goal** based upon a broadly shared recognition of a societal problem and collective aspirations.
2. Assess the general population **performance relative to the universal goal**.
3. **Identify groups performing differently** with respect to the goal and the overall population. Groups should be disaggregated.
 - T/U does not presuppose how groups are defined, it rejects an essentialism that fixes a group in terms of situatedness, stratification and marginality, but also in terms of identity, which we regard as dynamic rather than static.
4. **Assess and understand the structures** that support or impede each group or community from achieving the universal goal.
 - Much of what we think of as a difference between groups and identity is a difference between situatedness in structures.
5. **Develop and implement targeted strategies** for each group to reach the universal goal.
6. Decide how the T/U strategy or platform is going to be **described and discussed** by people involved with implementation, support, assessment, and being ambassadors for targeted strategies.

Step 1: Co-create a Universal Goal

- When working any specific issue, there is **usually an implicit equity goal**.
- To make the T/U framework applicable, **it's important to make the goal explicit**.
- If something is a problem, then it's usually because it diverges from our aspirations.
- **The heart of this step is to establish a universal goal in relation to the societal problem, when possible the goal should be co-created.**

Step 2: Assess the general population performance relative to the universal goal

- Identify the **difference between the universal goal and overall performance.**
- Understand **how well the overall population fares** relative to the universal goal.
- General performance measure **does not become the baseline** for a T/U framework.
- Assessment of general population **provides a context to understand the problem.**
- Forms the **foundation for the development of targeted strategies.**

Step 3: Identify groups that are performing differently with respect to the goal and the overall population

- Conduct a more **granular assessment of how various subgroups perform relative to the goal.**
- Disaggregating **might say more about the structure** and how opportunity is distributed than the nature of the group.
- If we disaggregating data further we can **begin to see that groups have different needs to reaching the universal goal.**
- Not to identify disparities between subgroups, but to **identify distance from the universal goal.**
- Geography matters, particular **places may also be identified as constituent groups** by themselves in terms of the universal goal.

Step 4: Assess Pro-actively design strategies that move groups each group to the universal not just what impede.

- We must **understand the structure that shape the outcomes for each group.**
- **Investigation of the problem and the circumstances** that confront each group or impede achievement.
- This analysis **directly shapes and informs the strategies** that will emerge in the final step.
- Assess **lack of supports** that might also form an impediment to the universal goal.
- Use a **mixed-methods analysis** including quantitative demographics and qualitative sources.

Step 5: Design and implement targeted strategies for each group to reach the universal goal.

- Create and implement specific strategies that **build new structures of belonging** and/or avoid existing structural barriers
- Be aware that **different implementation strategies may be required** for different groups and/or institutions or systems you are targeting.
 - Different groups need different support. Some groups also need more help because groups are situated differently with respect to the goal.
- Implementation strategies derived in this step of the targeted universalism framework are **outcome oriented or evaluated for success.**

Step 6: Targeted Universalism as a communication strategy

A technically correct strategy is necessary, but not sufficient to create belonging.

- The **way we work** for a change is important
- The **way we talk** about a change is important

“Doing” targeted universalism is one way we can **create new narratives**.

- T/U is not best used as a way to garner support for traditional strategies that are designed to serve a specific group of individuals
- Even if guardrails limit the capacity to substantially reorient or redesign a project, the **method and style of running that project can shift its nature from one of breaking to bridging**.
- “We are focusing right now on directing these resources to this specific group of people. But we’re making changes that are on the pathway of taking on this shared challenge.”

Transformation from within

- You will not be able to contribute to the charge toward a society of belonging if your organization does not reflect this vision of society internally.
 - Do you have a diverse staff?
 - Is your working environment top down or is it collaborative?
 - Is everyone's input and perspective valued?
- Each sector has a responsibility to think before acting.
- This type of cognizance requires thinking about structures and culture
- What are your stories?



Addressing power to foster belonging

Consider:

- Who has the most power in the room?
- Who has the most space?
- Who has the most authentic voice?
- How is power being used?
- What are each parties' sacred symbols?
- Whose perspectives shape both the “problem” and the “solution”?
- How can leaders attend to power distributively?
- How can we bridge and link despite power differentials?





Implementation Case Studies

Building a sense of Belonging at Google

We're making sure every Googler feels seen, connected, supported, and empowered to participate fully:

Addressing barriers for everyone means taking targeted action. We've started with these key issues:

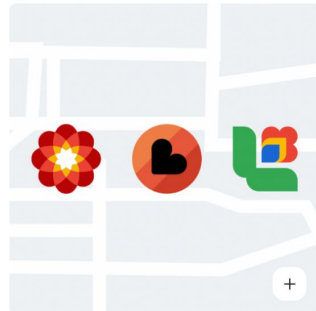
Racial equity Disability inclusion Gender equity LGBTQ+ inclusion Veteran inclusion

30%

increase in leadership representation of Black+, Latinx+, and Native American+ Googlers by 2025



Helping everyone identify and support Asian-, Black-, and Latino-owned businesses



Celebrating the impact of the Asian American and Pacific Islander community

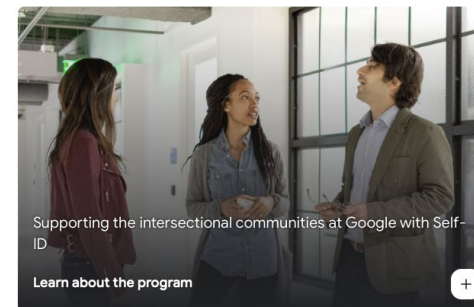
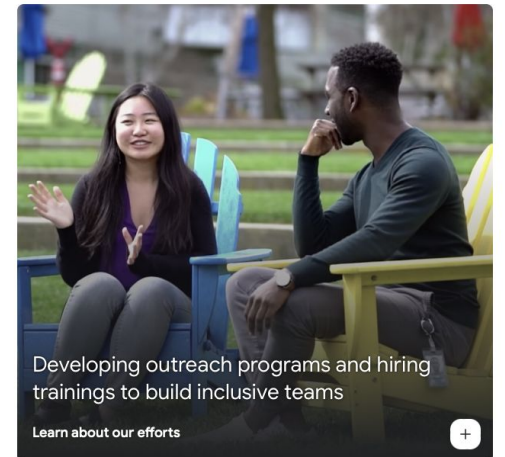
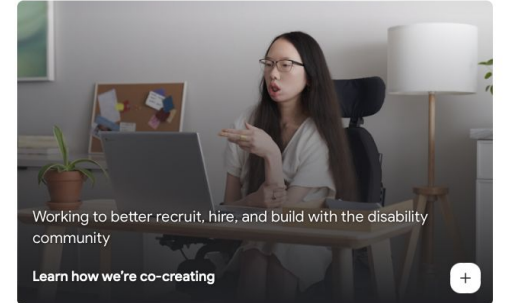


[Learn more about our racial equity work](#)

30%

increase in leadership representation of Black+, Latinx+, and Native American+ Googlers by 2025

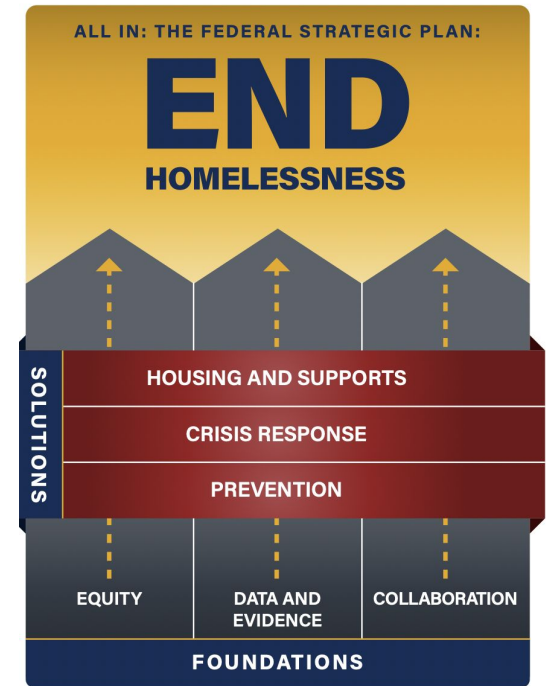
[Learn about our hiring goals](#)



The Federal Strategic Plan to Prevent and End Homelessness

Biden Administration Calls for 25% Cut in Homelessness by 2025

The Biden administration's new strategic plan to address homelessness includes a focus on equity and a promise to help cities build more housing.



As the strategies outlined in this plan are implemented, USICH will work with a broad range of stakeholders to adopt a “targeted universalism”³⁵ framework that promotes a universal reduction goal with targeted and tailored solutions based on the structures, cultures, and geographies of certain groups to help them overcome unique barriers. USICH recognizes that tailored solutions are needed for specific populations and geographic areas and that individuals and families experiencing multiple barriers often require special consideration and resources. USICH also recognizes that the federal government will need to rely on those most impacted by the policies and strategies promoted in this plan to design the tailored actions and guidance.

Example	Targeted Universalism Description
CUNY Score	Strengths and limitations of comparing dominants groups and disparities focused on closing gaps.
King County Determinants of Equity	Similarities and differences between theory of change and T/U alongside determinants of equity.
Prosper Portland	Measurements and monitoring equity indicators overtime as it relates to outcomes-oriented approach in T/U.
County of San Diego: Housing	Structural and systems change in the use of equity indicators to improve strategies within a T/U framework.
GARE Getting to Results	Community participation in defining disaggregated outcomes as a measurement of outcome-based equity.
Seattle's Pedestrian Master Plan	Importance of structural changes in the use of geography and place-based data to create and prioritize a set of strategies within T/U.



We in the developed world are like homeowners who inherited a house on a piece of land that is beautiful on the outside, but whose soil is unstable loam and rock, heaving and contracting over generations ... And, yes. Not one of us was here when this house was built. Our immediate ancestors may have had nothing to do with it, but here we are, the current occupants of a property with stress cracks and bowed walls and fissures built into the foundation. We are the heirs to whatever is right or wrong with it. We did not erect the uneven pillars or joists, but they are ours to deal with now.

Isabel Wilkerson, *Caste*

Questions and Questions???

Targeted strategies can be important to T/U

Important questions about My Brother's Keeper have been raised. Even those who undoubtedly care about men and boys of color have questioned, **"But why this group and not others?"**

Some may acknowledge that there is a strong case that black boys need focused support but also ask, **"What about girls and women of color?"** What about any groups that through no fault of their own find themselves struggling to stay in their homes, afford higher education, or keep their families on track?"

What must inform our policies is not equal treatment but equal concern for all groups and individuals. A plan that focuses on everyone, without recognizing that different groups are in unique situations and need responses appropriate to their position, will fail at delivering equal concern or effective outcomes.

...This is not to deny the experience of women of color or women in general or disabled people or any other marginalized or vulnerable group. **Those who would seriously argue against focusing on groups that are situated differently would have to reject not only focusing on boys and men of color but all groups.**

Instead, we need to **better understand how different groups are situated and embrace a plan to support all groups**, understanding that **resources and time frames should not and cannot be the same.**

THE CHRONICLE
OF PHILANTHROPY

SUBSCRIBE

PolicyLink CEO Weighs In on My Brother's Keeper

OPINION



Obama's Plan to Aid Black Men and Boys Will Be a Boon to Other Groups, Too

By John A. Powell and Maya Rockeymoore

JULY 8, 2014

https://www.philanthropy.com/article/obamas-plan-to-aid-black-men-and-boys-will-be-a-boon-to-other-groups-too/?cid=gen_sign_in