

# Belonging Without Othering



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Othering &  
Belonging  
Institute

## DATE

October 19, 2023

## PRESENTER

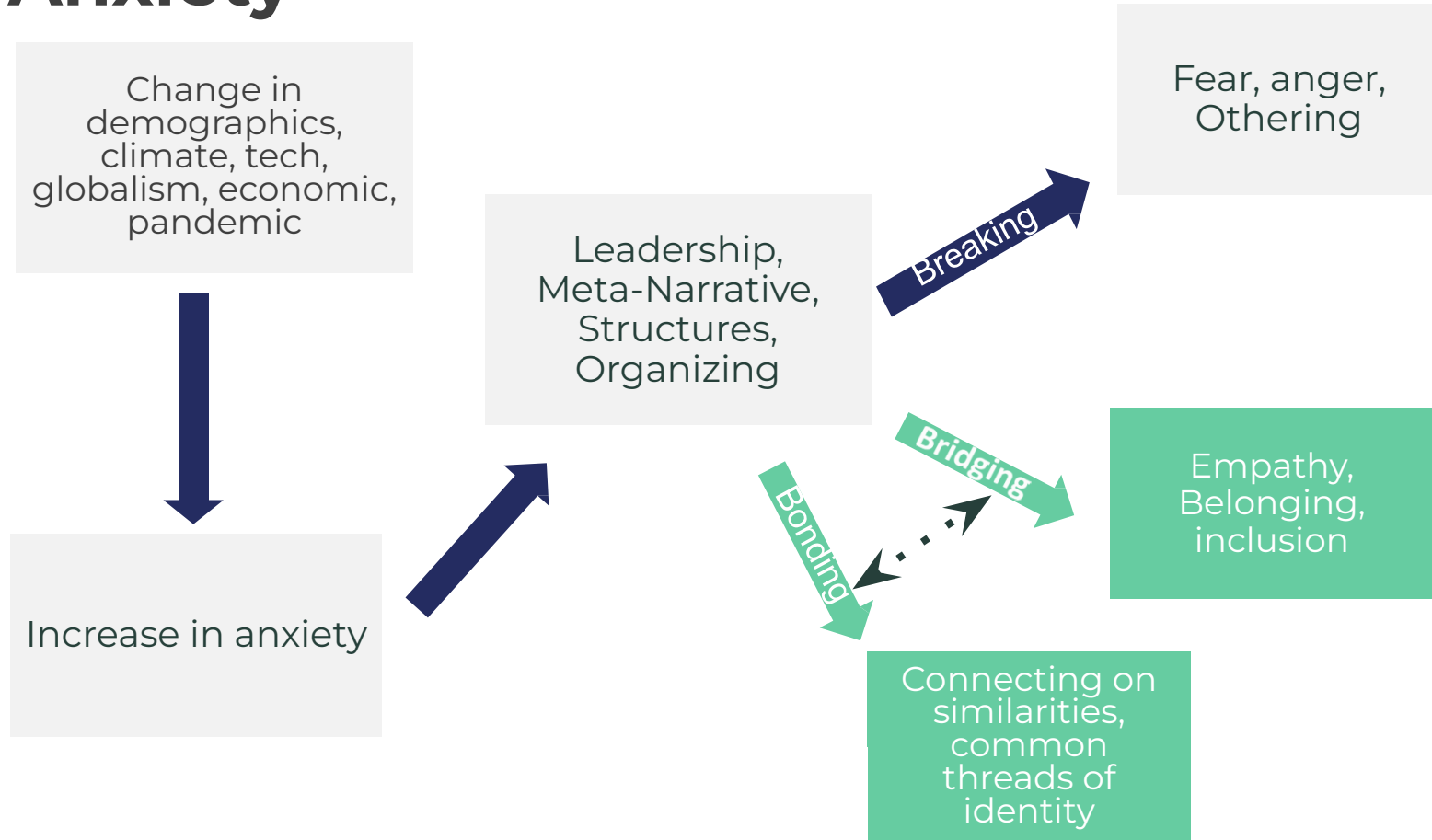
john a. powell  
Board Chair, Perception Institute  
Director, Othering & Belonging Institute

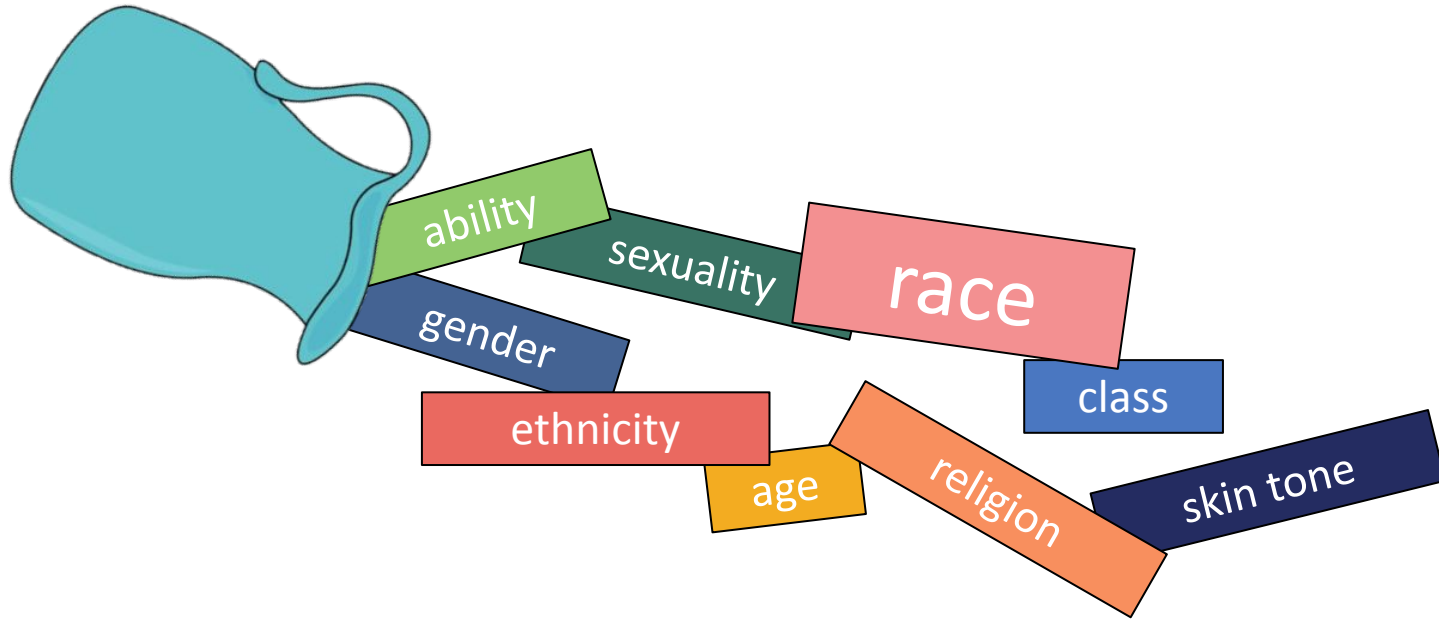
## AUTHORIAL SUPPORT

Clarisa Coronado,  
Research Assistant

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

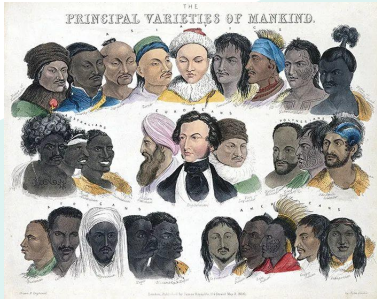
# Rapid Change Produces Collective Anxiety





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

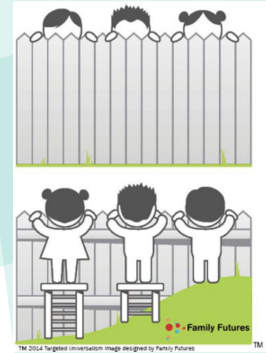
# A Progression in How We Address Structural Inequality



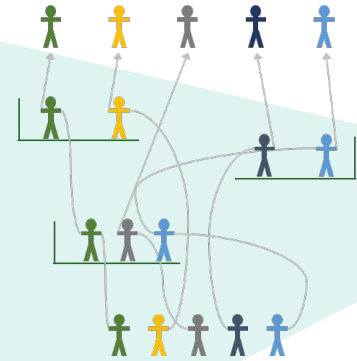
**Extreme Inequality**



**Equality**



**Equity**



**Targeted Universalism & Belonging (Equity 2.0)**

***The arc of the moral universe is long but it bends toward justice.***

-Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., "Remaining Awake Through a Great Revolution." Speech given at the National Cathedral, March 31, 1968.

# Aristotle, Equality, and Targeted Universalism



**Belonging is about  
co-creating and  
co-owning  
structures to belong.**

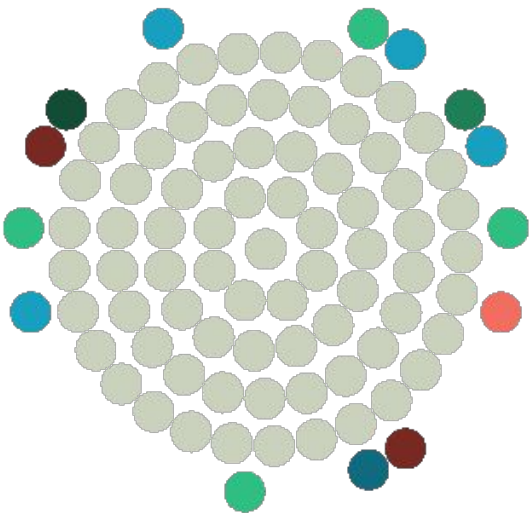


# A framework for belonging

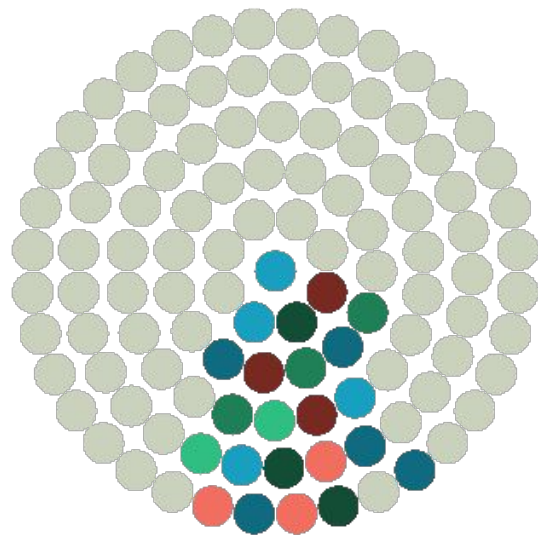
|                      | Low Belonging   | High Belonging   |
|----------------------|---|--|
| Uniqueness is Valued | Differentiation<br><i>I am different</i><br><i>I am uncomfortable</i> | Deep Belonging<br><i>I belong</i><br><i>I can be myself</i>        |
| Sameness is Valued   | Exclusion<br><i>I am different</i><br><i>I am uncomfortable</i>       | Assimilation<br><i>I can fit in</i><br><i>I have to be guarded</i> |

Source: Adapted from Josh Bersin, "Why Belonging is Such a Big Deal in Business Today," August 31, 2020.

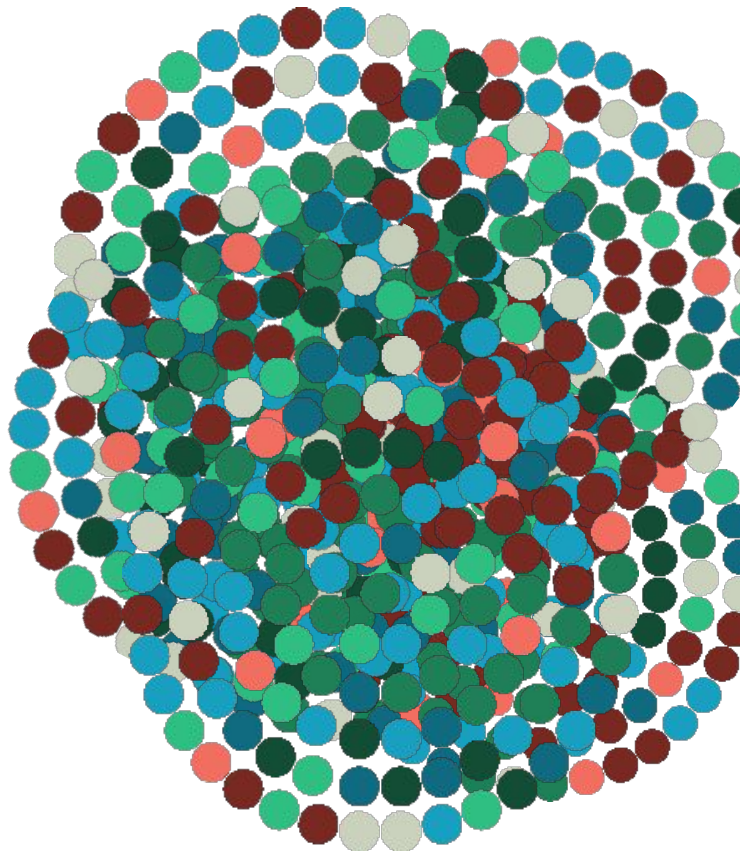




**Exclusion**



**Inclusion**

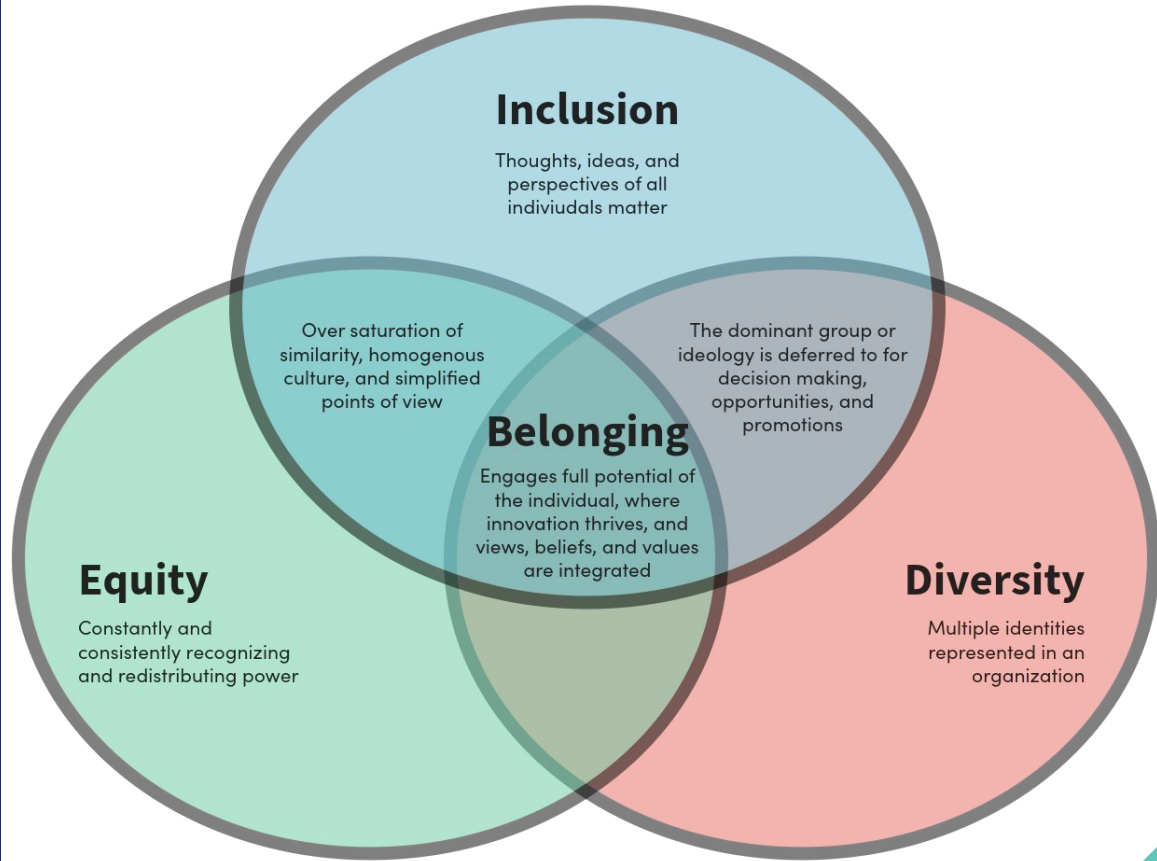


**Belonging**

# From Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion to Bridging and Belonging

## Why move from DEI to Bridging and Belonging?

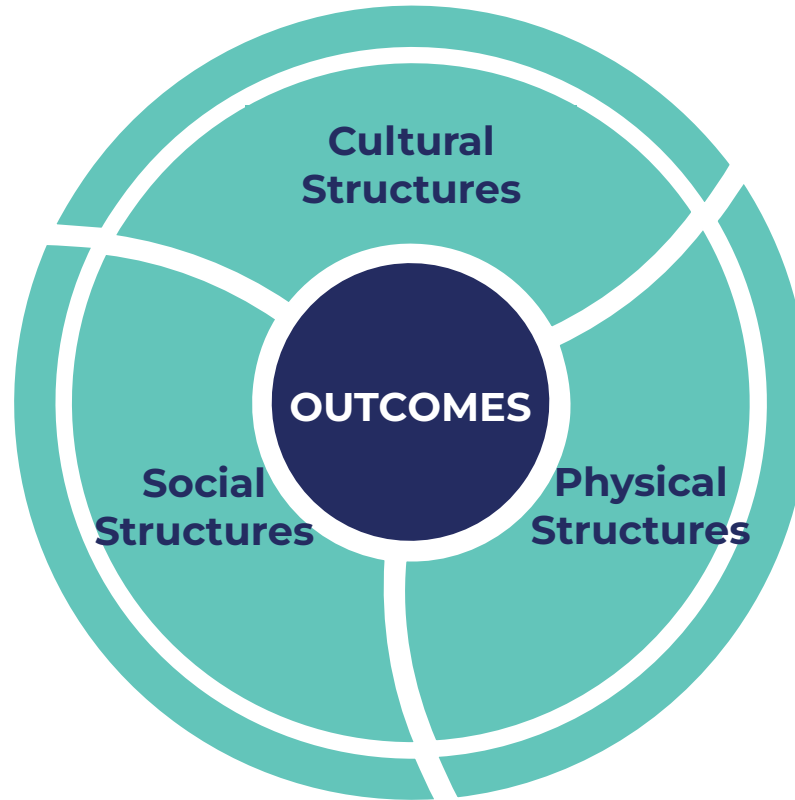
- We don't want to just welcome people into existing structures
- We want people to **co-create structures and institutions together**
- We want to build systems that are welcoming to all and that everyone has a stake in, where everyone is represented and the **work of bridging happens through co-creation**



# Othering & Belonging within Structures

We are all situated within structures, but not evenly.

These structures are not neutral and interact in ways that produce differential outcomes.



Structures unevenly distribute benefits and burdens to various groups.

Power gives us greater positive access to structures and more ability to shape structures.

# Structures do work

Power and position matter

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.

# Structures are not neutral. They do work.

Think about the design of airplanes.

How might they be biased?

- While most flight attendants and many passengers are female, the luggage bins are designed for tall people with plenty of upper body strength.
- Airline seating is designed for smaller sized passenger bodies and bodies of average height.



# 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**

# Narratives of Othering & Belonging

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

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- **Bonding:** Connecting to people like you in some important way

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

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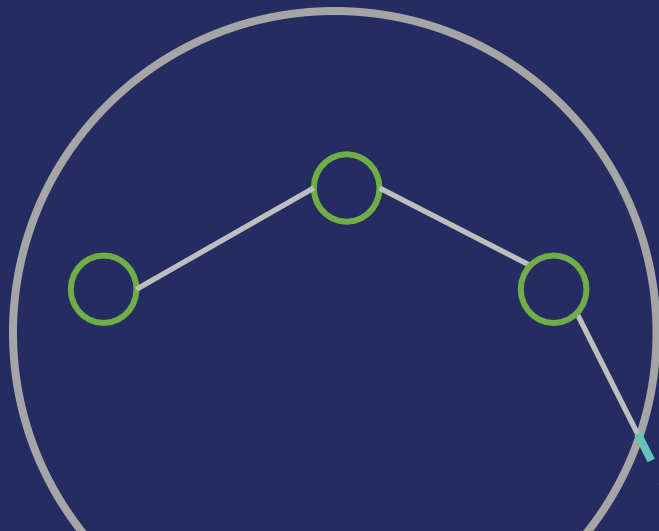
# Examples of breaking:

## BREAKING:

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



**WHITE NATIONALISM**



North America



Europe



Oceania

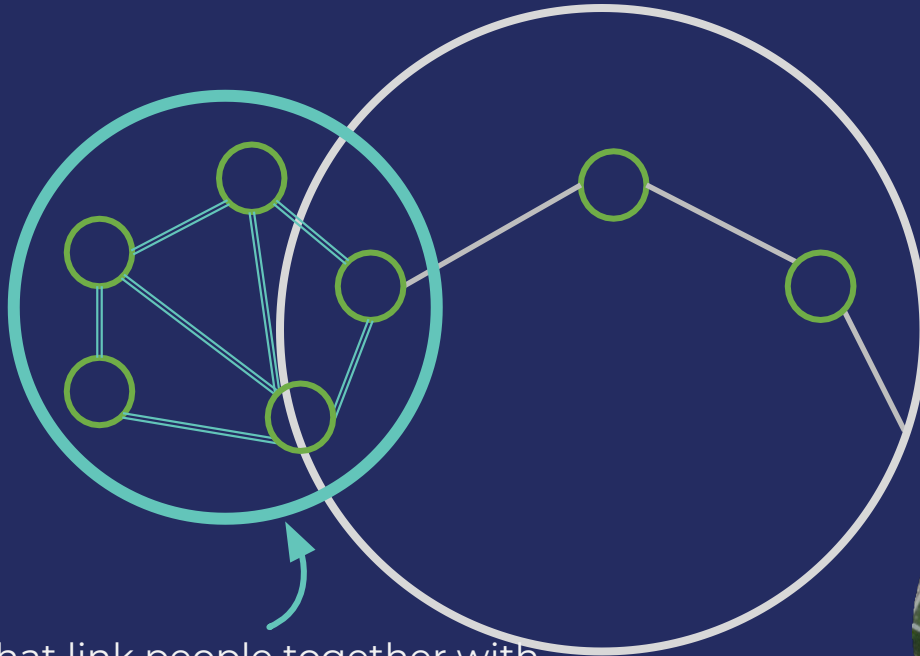


**PROGRESSIVE INFIGHTING**





# 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.

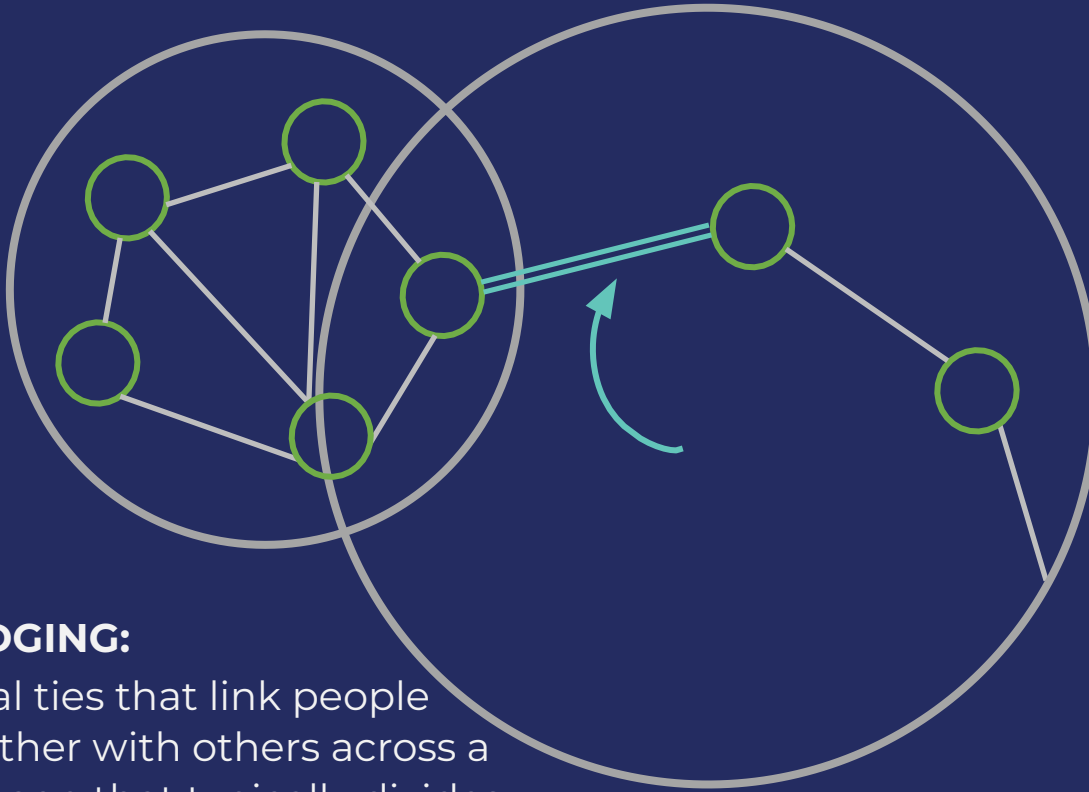


**FAMILY**



**NEIGHBORHOOD**

# Examples of bridging:



## BRIDGING:

Social ties that link people together with others across a cleavage that typically divides society.



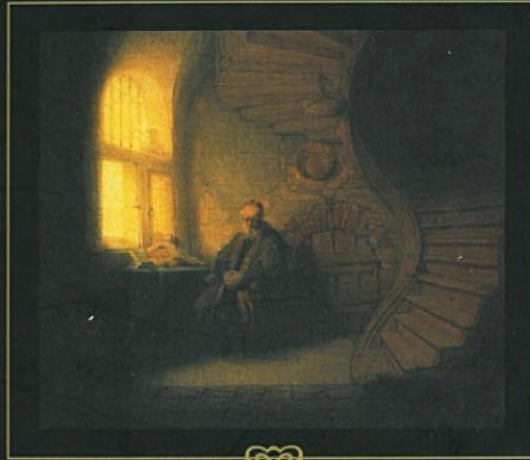
LGB  
T



MOSQUE IN NEW ZEALAND

*In the Name of*  
**IDENTITY**

*Violence and the Need to Belong*



**AMIN MAALOUF**

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

CULTURE

## How Equity Will Destroy America

*Equity and equal opportunity are fundamentally incompatible.*

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

**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. ..."

# Equity Backlash

# 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**

# Bridging

- **Bridging** addresses a breaking dynamic in order to develop a cohesive, more inclusive, durable, and more expansive “we” that can be identified and recognized to bring about belonging and greater social justice.
- To “**bridge**” involves two or more people or groups coming together across acknowledged lines of difference (such as race and/or power dynamics) in a way that both affirms their distinct identities and creates a new inclusive “we” identity.
- The new “we” that results need not agree on everything, or even very much; but its members should have a shared empathy and lasting stake in one another. Bridging rejects all strict “us versus them” framings, but without erasing what is different and unique in each party

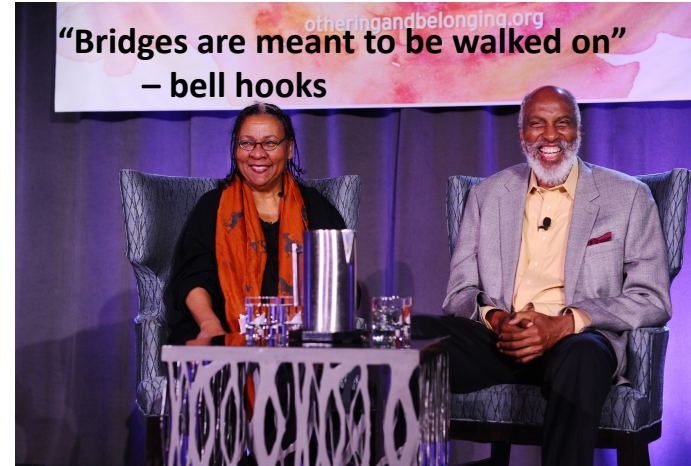
Bridging expands the circle of human concern, build a more inclusive “we”

Bridging is not same-ing

Bridging engages power

It contains multitudes

- Short vs long
- Weak vs strong
- Transactional vs transformational
- Across elevations



## **Bridging is a precondition for belonging. Without bridging, it is not possible to build a society in which everyone belongs.**

- Creating a culture of bridging can transform a culture of shaming, separation, and judgment into one built on curiosity, transformation, celebration, and care.
- Bridging can also help build social capital and build power by bringing folks across different identities together.
- Bridging can be used to support spaces seeking cross-movement collaboration towards a shared goal.
- Building a culture of bridging is not always easy, we need practice
- **Power matters:** bridging may look different when there is a power differential.



# Power impacts bridging

Consider an example of how power can distort bridging in terms of empathy or cooperation from popular culture.

- Marta Cabrera is one of the protagonists. She is Latinx and works for a rich white family as a caregiver for the patriarch of the family. Marta lives with her undocumented mother.
- In one scene, members of the Thrombey family, the wealthy white family for whom Marta works, are discussing what should be the appropriate policies for undocumented people living in the United States. In the middle of the discussion, one of the family members turns to Marta and asks her if she has an opinion on this matter. She cannot fully engage in the conversation because of the power difference.
- The effort to **bridge**—to share an empathic space—superficially appears to be between individuals in the scene. But there are clearly background structures at play that implicate both power and identity that shape their response and experience.
- Much of the work on bridging today assumes that it is between individuals that don't understand each other and may harbor prejudice.
- There is a further assumption that this prejudice is actually hurt and misunderstanding.



While power imbalance can distort the effort to bridge, the loading up of preconditions can be used as a reason not to bridge. The precondition is not a call for complete equality.

*Bridging is a process that requires both a set of conditions, such as relative equality and agency, as well as a **container** with background or foreground goals participants can share. Where these conditions are lacking, there must be an effort to find or create them. **Leadership, narrative, and structural sensitivity are the keys.***

# How do we bridge in a fragmented environment?

*The solution to othering is bridging, not more othering. This is also the case with fragmentation.*

*While many social justice activists may view “breaking” as a way of protecting themselves from external forces who seek to blame, injure, or divide, this response harms movements’ ability to build power. As we know, there is power in diversity, numbers, and transformation—all of which require cross-group engagement, not merely in-group bonding.*



# 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.



# Create more containers where people can come together

- An opportunity to move beyond polarization and toward co-creation
- Structural belonging requires mutual power, access, and opportunity among all groups and individuals within a shared container (such as a society, organization, club, etc).



# Stories and Narratives

Who's in our stories?  
Who is represented?  
Who is left out?



How do we expand our circles to include everyone in our stories and narratives?

# Different Histories



# Parallel Stories

- Bridging across race and nationality
- Widening political analysis
- Interrupting the dominant narratives
- Developing trust and community

## Building solidarity through generalized reciprocity

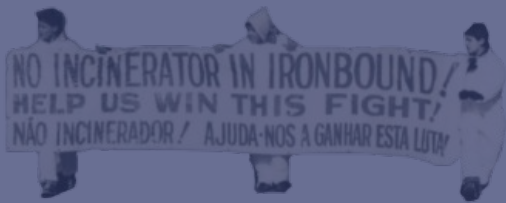
Indirect reciprocity and unilateral flows of benefit produces stronger bonds of solidarity.

- stronger trust
- greater affective regard
- perception of greater social unity
- stronger feelings of commitment.



Residents of Newark's Ironbound neighborhood protest against the construction of a garbage incinerator, circa 1984. The multilingual messaging reflects the diversity of the activist community in the Ironbound. Photo from the Ironbound Community Corporation archive.

# Bridging to Belonging Case Study



## Breaking

Breaking was occurring within the Environmental Justice Program because of underlying tensions between African Americans and immigrants. Some members of the African American community felt threatened by Latinx immigrants, believing they were taking the few available jobs and taking over historically Black neighborhoods. Some Latinx immigrants believed the dominant narrative that claims the reason many African Americans have not made it is because of their own lack of initiative, instead of the pervasive impact of structural racism. The tension between the two communities was exacerbated when an undocumented Latino immigrant was convicted of murdering an African American man. The tension rolled into the program.

## Bridging

In order to address the breaking dynamic, an intentional **bridging** dialogue was organized for the African American members and Latin American immigrants. This case focuses on the work done with the African American community. The bridging dialogue was structured into three parts: 1) a 30 minute documentary that chronicled the struggle against Jim Crow segregation, racism and economic exploitation that led to the Great Migration from the South, 2) personal testimony about their families' migration stories from the facilitator and audience members, and 3) a comparison of the reasons why African Americans left the US South to why immigrants leave their home countries. This led African Americans to understand their shared identity with Latinx immigrants as exploited migrants. It also helped link the shared fate of African Americans and Latinx folks.

## Belonging

This event opened dialogue and conversation which allowed the African Americans in the group to truly see the Latinx members, leading to increased empathy and consideration of shared struggles and a shared identity. This change translated in the way that African Americans and Latinx immigrants in the Environmental Justice Program interacted with one another. There was also further solidarity displayed through African Americans joining in on protesting against immigrant detention.



# City workers learning Spanish to bridge communication gaps with growing Hispanic population

November 15 | 2022



President of Silva Languages, instructs City employees in an 8-week Spanish course offered at City Hall. Photo from City of Covington press release.

An abstract illustration featuring a group of diverse people in a colorful, stylized landscape. The scene includes a large yellow sun, a blue sky, and various colored hills and shapes. The people are depicted in simple, flat colors, some standing and some sitting. The overall mood is warm and inclusive. The text "EXPRESSIONS OF BELONGING" is centered in a white, bold, sans-serif font over a dark blue horizontal band.

# EXPRESSIONS OF BELONGING

## Museums Fostering Belonging



In an increasingly polarized world, the American Alliance Museums began exploring the role of museums in bridging divides and bringing communities together

- building empathy and understanding
- fostering a sense of belonging
- creating more welcoming and inclusive communities

WELCOMING  
AMERICA



BUILDING A NATION OF NEIGHBORS

## Belonging in Practice

Welcoming America uses belonging strategies to build communities that welcome immigrants and values their customs and contributions.



# A Belonging City in Rockford Illinois



Artists, sponsors and other supporters of the Rockford Area Arts Council's Screw City Steel initiative pose for a photo Tuesday, Oct. 4, 2022, in front of Laura Gomef's mural in Davis Park. (Photo by Kevin Haas/Rock River Current)

## Belonging Task Force Structure



# Can we imagine new structures that honor our multiple fluid identities & belonging?



***The goal is not just to  
remove barriers***



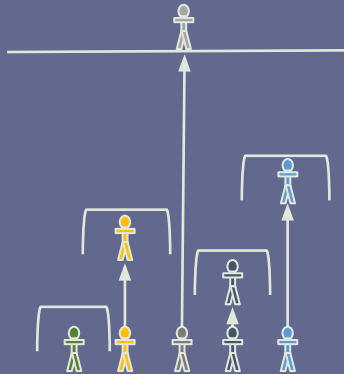
***The goal is to co-create  
new structures for thriving***



# Targeted Universalism as a way to get to Belonging

## Structural inequity

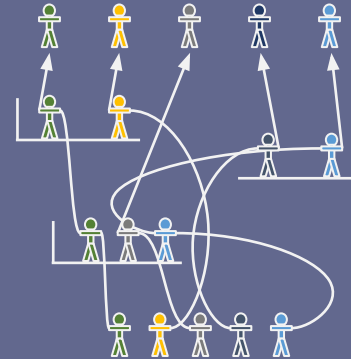
produces consistently different outcomes for different communities



vs.

## Targeted Universalism

responds with universal goals and targeted solutions



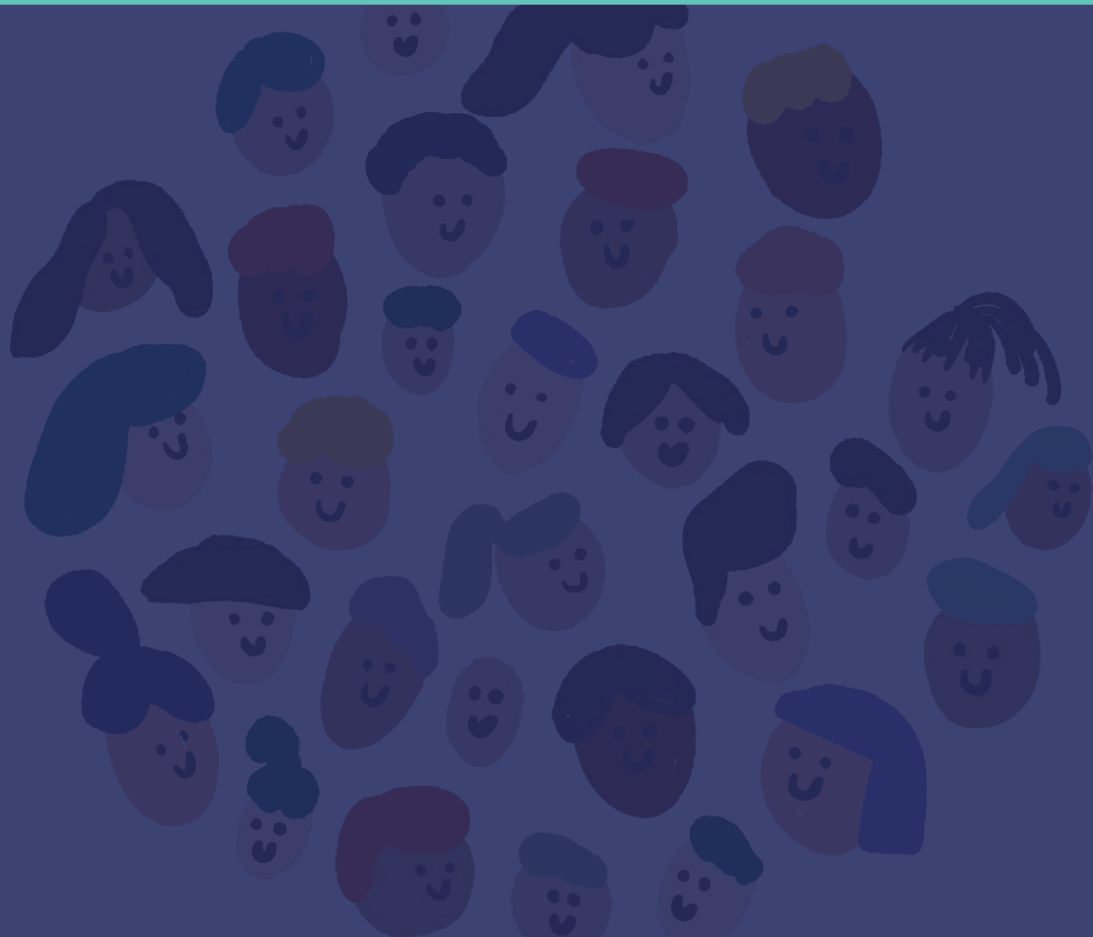
Targeted Universalism **rejects a blanket universal** which is likely to be indifferent to the reality that different groups are situated differently relative to the institutions and resources of society. TU is fixated on structures (**situatedness**) & **outcomes** (impacts of structural changes).



# Targeted Universalism Steps

- 1.** Co-create a universal goal
- 2.** Assess the general population performance relative to the universal goal; situatedness
- 3.** Identify groups performing differently with respect to the goal & the overall population
- 4.** Assess & understand the structures that support or impede each group from achieving the universal goal
- 5.** Develop and implement targeted strategies so all groups reach goal
- 6.** Develop bridging messaging and stories that support strategies. Engaging bridging as a tool for implementation.

# THANK YOU!

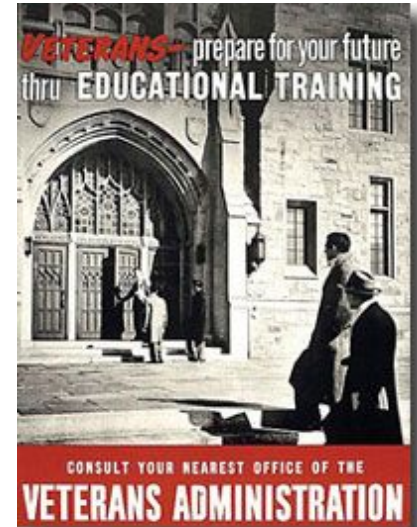


The background is a vibrant, abstract composition of overlapping organic shapes in shades of blue, green, yellow, orange, and pink. Silhouettes of diverse people are scattered throughout: a woman in a hijab in the top left, a group of four women in the center, and a woman holding a child in the top right. A semi-transparent blue horizontal band runs across the middle of the page, serving as a backdrop for the title.

# APPENDIX

# 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



# Targeted Universalism

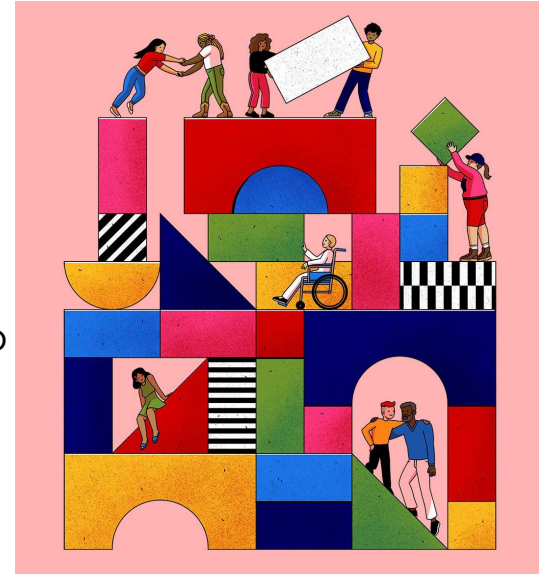
TU is an approach that supports the **needs of the particular(s)** while reminding us that we are all **part of the same social fabric**.

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

TU **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. TU is fixated on structures (**situatedness**) & **outcomes** (impacts of structural changes).

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

We are situated differently and this experience **centers TU structural analysis & defining the problem**.



# Universal Goals Case Study: King County, WA

|  |   |
|--|---|
| <b>Child &amp; youth development</b>   | Provide access for all parents to the resources needed to raise healthy, happy children. Ensure that all children remain connected to their families and communities as they grow older, have plenty of opportunities for development, and are staying healthy and avoiding risky behaviors.                    |
| <b>Economic development &amp; jobs</b> | Ensure that all people are prepared to participate in the workforce. Create economic (employment and contracting) opportunities that are accessible to all groups, pay family support wages, and have upward mobility. Foster a welcoming environment for all kinds of businesses, not just large corporations. |
| <b>Environment &amp; climate</b>       | Include the perspective and participation of all residents in decisions relating to climate/environment/sustainability governance. Enhance climate resiliency for all groups, not just those that are well-resourced.   |
| <b>Housing</b>                         | Finance, build, and ensure access for all people to quality housing that is strategically located, and [ensure that] that nobody is at risk of experiencing homelessness.   |

# Help Me Grow (HMG): A Model of Targeted Universalism to Advance Equity and Promote the Well-Being of All Children

Using targeted universalism as its strategy to pursue equity for families with young children, HMG aims to realize a universal goal:

All families with young children have easy and quick access to the resources and services they want and need in order to best support their children's development, health, and well-being.

HMG provides all families with a comprehensive, cross-sector, integrated early childhood system that connects together all service professionals, child health providers, and families in order to advance developmental promotion, early detection, referral, linkage, and follow-up.

HMG is accessible to all families within a community or state and also designs and implements specific approaches that work best to engage, partner with, and serve the distinct and unique families that live in a particular community or state

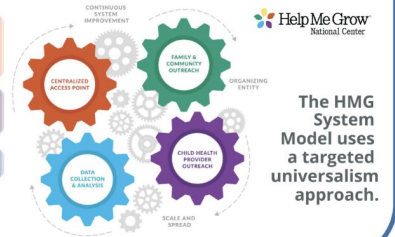
## Applying Targeted Universalism to Early Childhood: The Help Me Grow Model

If we aim to provide **all families** with:

An early childhood systems model that **engages, partners with, and serves families through implementing and measuring specific approaches targeted to a particular community or state;**

A **comprehensive, cross-sector, integrated early childhood system** that connects all service professionals, child health providers and families; and

**Free, quick and easy access to this system** within a community or state;



...then we:

**Create a broad coalition** of partners committed to a universal goal and leveraging data to continually identifying which groups are not getting the resources they need and why

**Advance universal prevention and minimize gaps** in developmental promotion, early detection, referral, linkage, and follow-up

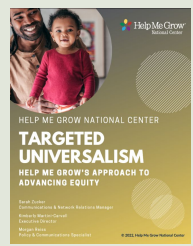
**Establish universal access with targeted outreach** to create equal opportunity for underserved, disenfranchised populations



...so that **all children** attain positive health and developmental outcomes.



# HMG: A Model of Targeted Universalism to Advance Equity and Promote the Well-Being of All Children



## Barriers HMG attempts to address:

- Existing programs in health, early care and education, economic assistance, and family services are rarely integrated.
- Accessibility often depends on location, and many have strict eligibility criteria such as income, location, diagnosis, or cost.
- Historical, institutionalized, and structural racism has been evidenced to deter families of color from seeking services.
- Early childhood policies and processes are highly fragmented and difficult to navigate, with confusing points of entry that are particularly problematic for those experiencing adversities such as poverty, systemic racism, cultural disenfranchisement, geographic isolation, and violence.

## How HMG addresses barriers:

HMG is an evidence-based model that effectively promotes early childhood system-building efforts. Making sure the unique needs of different groups of children are met requires a systemic approach to organizing the currently fractured landscape of services. Rather than being a stand-alone program, it builds on existing programs to ensure seamless, coordinated services for families with young children.

## HMG ensures that

1. families have professional support in accessing services easily and quickly (Centralized Access Point)
2. the community understands and promotes child development (Family & Community Outreach)
3. child health professionals are supported in their efforts to monitor children's development and help families get connected to supports that they want and need (Child Health Care Provider Outreach)
4. data are being used to constantly improve systems of care for families (Data Collection & Analysis)

# THANK YOU!

