



AMERICAN  
PSYCHOLOGICAL  
ASSOCIATION

May 31, 2022

**Responding to NOT-DA-22-052**

**The NIDA Racial Equity Initiative**

National Institute on Drug Abuse (NIDA)

Dear Equity Action Plan leaders:

On behalf of the American Psychological Association (APA), I appreciate NIDA's many efforts to address the impact of structural racism on addiction science and to take action to promote racial equity in NIDA's workplace, workforce, and research portfolio. The APA is the largest scientific and professional organization representing psychology in the United States. APA's membership includes over 133,000 researchers, educators, clinicians, consultants and students. APA works to advance the creation, communication and application of psychological knowledge to benefit society and improve people's lives.

As you may know, APA has been engaging in similar racial equity activities. Last year the APA Council of Representatives approved an apology to people of color from the APA for its actions that contributed to and failed to combat discrimination and racism within the association and in the broader society. APA also adopted an [inventory](#) outlining the changes the association has made and is making, and is implementing an action plan to increase accountability. This association is committed to conducting the necessary work to engage psychological science and our organization to achieve equity, diversity, and inclusion (DEI). Successful DEI initiatives of NIDA and other federal research funding agencies will help APA move forward by creating additional opportunities for psychologists in the federal workforce and in addiction-related research, by increasing knowledge about and expanding research with under-represented populations, and by laying the foundation for fairer and more inclusive policies. Similarly, APA's DEI successes should enhance those of NIDA.

As NIDA addresses its own internal dynamics and struggles with respect to racial equity, the institute will be in an enhanced position to foster a science that addresses the complexities of racial disparities in substance abuse and addiction in the U.S. and beyond. Scientific organizations must acknowledge the data that demonstrate that diversity, equity, and inclusion are essential for organizational effectiveness. Research has shown a negative correlation between lack of inclusive culture and wellness and job performance.<sup>1</sup> NIDA's action plan with its simultaneous focus on its own workplace, contributions to the

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<sup>1</sup> Aysola J, Barg FK, Martinez AB, et al. Perceptions of factors associated with inclusive work and learning environments in health care organizations: a qualitative narrative analysis. *JAMA Netw Open*. 2018;1(4):e181003

scientific workforce, and support of research to advance equity and fairness in the addictions space, contains many strong ideas.

It is common for scientific institutions to reflect the problems within the broader society with respect to racial equity, especially if people of color are clustered into lower rank positions within an organization and White individuals are in positions of leadership and power. NIDA (and all institutions) should continue to highlight the effort of achieving racial equity when the individuals who hold power and decision-making capacity represent people from a limited set of backgrounds.<sup>2</sup> A challenge is to ensure there are checks and balances in place to address this dilemma when access to education and positions of authority are stratified by race and ethnicity as in the US. NIDA's efforts to build a more inclusive workplace culture by involving all employees makes a critical statement that equity and inclusion is everyone's job, not just the charge of the Equity and Inclusion Officer.

Each layer of the organization has an important role to play, as you acknowledge by measuring employee views, requiring training, and providing opportunities for input at all levels. Organizational leadership is especially critical to realize gains in diversity, equity, and inclusion.<sup>3</sup> Strong leadership helps maintain the pressure and urgency for change as some gains take longer to achieve than others. It is important that organizational leaders and supervisors be mindful of, monitor, and address potential backlash from White employees who view the activities as a threat to their wellbeing/status. Data from Brown and Jacoby-Senghor, cited below, show that many White Americans endorse equity as a principle but can recoil when efforts to redress inequities occur.<sup>4</sup>

Just as some employees will find it hard to accept the organizational change that comes with making the workplace fairer and more equitable, some employees are bearing heavier burdens due to their intersectional status. Employees of color who also identify as female, who are LGBTQ or live with disabilities, may need additional support.

NIDA's efforts to ensure the diversity of the workforce it helps support are critically important. Early exposure to addiction science and opportunities to work with scientists are essential to attract diverse students to pathways leading to scientific careers. Minority supplements to funded grants are a very useful mechanism for supporting additional scientists and have the flexible advantage of allowing the support of high school students or undergraduates for summer training. Training and support for diverse scientists makes these individuals more competitive when applying for higher level positions in academia and other nonprofit research organizations including NIDA's future workforce. You are likely aware of APA's longstanding [Minority Fellowship Program](#). This program is funded now by SAMHSA and has a primary focus of enhancing the cultural competence of practicing psychologists. In the past APA

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<sup>2</sup> Smith, C. W., & Mayorga-Gallo, S. (2017). The new principle-policy gap: How diversity ideology subverts diversity initiatives. *Sociological Perspectives*, 60(5), 889-911.

<sup>3</sup> Adjo, J., Maybank, A., & Prakash, V. (2021). Building Inclusive Work Environments. *Pediatrics*, 148(Suppl 2). <https://doi.org/10.1542/peds.2021-051440E>

<sup>4</sup> Brown, N. D., & Jacoby-Senghor, D. S. (2021). Majority members misperceive even "win-win" diversity policies as unbeneficial to them. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*. Advance online publication. <https://doi.org/10.1037/pspi0000372>

has worked with NIH institutes on research training arms as well. APA is eager to work with you on this or other training programs where our participation would be helpful.

NIDA's plans to expand research on social determinants of health and minority health disparities in addiction are exciting. Supporting more research that seeks to counteract the impact of discrimination, and giving a greater priority to research projects that will impact disparities, are important steps toward eliminating those disparities. We know that NIDA has been supporting research that will enhance outreach to and treatment of people of color. As you note, many good ideas have surfaced, but a lot of good research is left on the table<sup>5</sup> <sup>6</sup>. Increasing the priority of this research will boost the resources available to support it. We encourage collaborations and co-funding with the Office of Behavioral and Social Sciences Research, other offices within the Office of the Director, and other institutes and centers where possible. We hope too that you can leverage NIDA's Clinical Trials Network, which is such a strong resource that other institutes don't have. Comorbid issues with substance use and abuse, including mental health, could benefit. Your focus on peer review processes is welcomed as well.

APA has taken the position that the work of diversity, equity, and inclusion is the most important issue that our science and profession is grappling with at this time. We are glad to partner with NIDA to help reach our mutual goals. Please contact me or Pat Kober at [pkobor@apa.org](mailto:pkobor@apa.org) for more information.

Sincerely yours,



Mitch Prinstein, PhD  
Chief Science Officer

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<sup>5</sup> Burlew, K., McCuistian, C., & Szapocznik, J. (2021). Racial/ethnic equity in substance use treatment research: the way forward. *Addict Sci Clin Pract*, 16(1), 50. <https://doi.org/10.1186/s13722-021-00256-4>

<sup>6</sup> Chrobot-Mason, D. (2012). Developing Multicultural Competence to Improve Cross-Race Work Relationships. *Psychologist-Manager Journal* (Taylor & Francis Ltd), 15(4), 199-218. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10887156.2012.730440>