

Introduction

The College for Behavioral Health Leadership's (CBHL) Equity-Grounded Leadership (EGL) Fellow Program is modeled after evidence-based leadership development approaches and reflects the experiences of both seasoned and emerging leaders in behavioral health. The program is a call to action for behavioral health leadership in all sectors to guide the transformation of behavioral health systems in the direction of intersectionality, equity, and anti-racism. The EGL Fellow Program's pilot cohort began in March 2022 with 23 fellows participating, and concluded in January 2023. The evaluation of the pilot program included a 14-item outcome survey focused on the program's five Principles of Change, administered to the fellows at mid- and post-program; an advisor and coaches survey; review of program documents; and conversations with the fellows, program leaders, workgroup, and advisory committee.

Equity-Grounded Leadership Principles of Change

- *Understands How Racism and Oppression Show Up in Behavioral Health*
- *Practices Intersectional Allyship*
- *Integrates Data Equity Frameworks and Culturally Responsive Behavioral Health Approaches*
- *Engages in Co-Production and Community-Driven Practices*
- *Demonstrates Transformational Leadership to Improve Communities*

Evaluation Highlights

- There was a statistically **significant improvement in all five Principles of Change items** from pre- to midpoint and pre- to post-program, demonstrating that the program achieved the desired outcomes.
- The **greatest improvement was observed in** "Familiarity with frameworks and models driven by community interests and strengths," **an item related to both integrating culturally responsive behavioral health approaches and engaging community-driven practices. Understanding how racism and oppression show up in behavioral health had the highest scores post-program.**
- **Program leadership rapidly incorporated feedback throughout the pilot, significantly improving programming going forward.**
- **Items related to the principle originally written as "Uses data-driven, systems-based, and community-defined decision-making practices," showed the smallest improvement** but prompted fruitful discussion and re-examination, resulting in refinement of this principle and one other.
- Fellows observed that **by the mid-point, their experiential learning projects were taking shape, increasing their readiness for additional design support.**
- **Fellows remarked on the positive impact of connecting** during cohort meetings and throughout the program **with peers** who are doing similar work and facing similar challenges.
- **Fellows shared that they found the support and guidance provided by program activities to be very impactful and this sentiment was echoed by coaches and advisors.** *"Our connections have been warm and tender. I feel there is trust and openness. We have co-created a space for supportive problem-solving."*

"I love the ability to be with each other and learn what different states are doing to advance equity. I learned some strategies and brought them back to my organization."

Fellows acknowledged that challenges were understandable given that they were the inaugural cohort.

- The most consistent feedback about **areas in need of improvement focused on expectations about time commitment and participation.** Fellows recommended that the time involved be made clear at the outset and that there be an effort to advocate for fellows to have protected time to participate in the program.
- **Both advisors and fellows commented on the need to decide how to address fellows' differing individual levels of development with respect to program content.** One advisor commented on the need to, *"Balance knowledge bases of approaches to health equity; some fellows have a lot of knowledge, and others don't. How does the program ensure everyone feels fully supported?"*

With this year of experience and a robust collection of evaluation findings, CBHL is well-positioned to address areas of growth, strengthen the program, and continue supporting the development of equity-grounded leaders prepared for co-producing meaningful change in their communities.