



The Network
for Public Health Law

2026-2027 Racial Health Equity Legal and Policy Cohort

Call for Applications | Informational Webinar

May 7, 2026

Copyright © 2026 Network for Public Health Law.





MEETING RECORDING

The meeting is being recorded, and you will receive an email when the recording and the slides are posted to The Network's website.

Disclaimer

The Network for Public Health Law promotes public health and health equity through non-partisan educational resources and technical assistance. The materials provided are provided solely for educational purposes and do not constitute legal advice. The Network's provision of these materials does not create an attorney-client relationship with you or any other person and is subject to the Network's [Disclaimer](#).



About the Network for Public Health Law

The Network advances health equity and improves health outcomes by providing guidance on the effective use of laws and policies.

We work with:

- Community and advocacy organizations
- Public health officials and practitioners
- Policymakers
- Attorneys

We provide:

- Research and analysis
- Strategic consultation and guidance
- Knowledge-building and training



Today's Speakers



Sara Rogers

Senior Public Health Policy Analyst
Health Equity Team
RHE Cohort Program Manager



Phyllis Jeden

Deputy Director,
Mid-States Region
Cohort Project Lead



Amy Lieberman

Deputy Director,
Harm Reduction
Cohort Project Lead



Emma Kaeser

Senior Attorney,
Mid-States Region
Cohort Project Lead



Betsy Lawton

Deputy Director,
Climate and Health
Cohort Project Lead



Today's Agenda

- 01** Racial Health Equity Legal and Policy Cohort Overview
- 02** Call for Applications for Cohort 3 (2026-2027)
- 03** Legal TA Projects: A Closer Look
- 04** Conclusion and Next Steps
- 05** Answering Your Questions

RHE Cohort Webpage

Everything we're discussing today can be found on the RHE Cohort webpage.

You will find: Required application form, a timeline, guidelines, this recorded information session, and much more!

<https://www.networkforphl.org/resources/topics/initiatives/rhe-cohort/>



Racial Health Equity Legal and Policy Cohort

Public health and community-based organizations continue to face significant barriers, including persistent systemic racism and bias, workforce shortages, infrastructure limitations, and constrained resources. These challenges make it difficult to navigate complex legal systems, implement promising approaches, and advance anti-racist laws

Organizations committed to working to advance racial health equity and improve the health of their communities face critical challenges

- Persistent structural racism and other systemic barriers continue
- Implicit and explicit bias and discrimination
- Complex legal landscape
- Rising anti-equity sentiments
- Funding losses
- Disconnect between community and policy systems
- State and local approaches to racial health equity are deeply polarized
- Chilling effects on care
- Workforce, data, infrastructure, and resource constraints
- Limited access to attorneys and expertise in law and policy
- Lack tools and expertise to navigate laws and policies that shape health
- Concerns over race-based policies being legally challenges
- Mistrust in government and lack of accountability
- Silos inhibit effective collaboration
- Loss of momentum

RHE Cohort Overview

Purpose: Created in 2021, to support governments, public health departments, community-based organizations, and advocates in using law and policy as tools to advance racial health equity.

Process: Selected organizations are paired with a dedicated Network team of law and policy experts who provide them with up to 40 hours of free tailored legal technical assistance (LTA) and peer learning opportunities to racial health equity projects over a seven-month period.

Outcomes: Increases capacity/skills to better use law and policy as tools for equity; Stronger cross-sector partnerships; Deepened understanding challenges/barriers facing those on the front lines of equity work; Expanded community of practice and ongoing learning

Our Expertise

These efforts are informed by our expansive legal and policy expertise on health equity and core public health issues, including

- Housing protections
- Food and nutrition policy
- Mental health and suicide prevention
- Social determinants of health
- Responding to attacks on health equity efforts
- Health in all policies
- Community engagement
- Climate change and environmental health
- Harm reduction
- Injury prevention
- Vaccines and immunizations
- Data privacy and data collection
- Public health authority and modernization



We have legal and policy expertise in these areas and more.

Technical Assistance and Support Provided

Types of Technical Assistance Available

Policy identification and issue scoping

Research and analysis

Jurisdiction scans

Implementation Assistance

Connection to other organizations or communities doing similar work

Education on legal concepts, tools, and frameworks

Guidance on legal and policy issues/landscape, advocacy, messaging

Development of laws, policies, or plans to address identified issues

Identifying model laws and policies

Creation of and connection to resources

Development of resources and written materials

Trainings and presentations, as appropriate

Prior RHE Cohort Technical Assistance Included:

- Reparation actions for **repairing harms caused by state-sanctioned violence**.
- Education on **race-conscious and race-neutral laws, policies, and strategies**.
- Developing a **health equity impact review process and tool**.
- Leveraging local policies, organizations, and programs for **community power building**
- Understanding the **anti-DEI executive order provisions** and the **ripple effects of federal policy decisions**
- Guidance on **federal policy implications for race-conscious programming**
- Conducting a **racial health equity analysis** of laws and existing policies used to operate and implement overdose prevention sites.
- Addressing legal obstacles to **hiring formerly incarcerated people as community health workers**.
- Community centered **mobile crisis response models** that are not law-enforcement centered.
- Licensure of **lactation consultants**.

Call for Applications: RHE Cohort 3 (2026-2027)

- Legal and policy support to promote racial health equity
- **Applications open:** May 1 – June 26, 2026, 5pm CT
- **No cost** to apply or participate
- Applicants explain their equity-focused project/issue, legal or policy challenges and/or need, provide background and contact information
- **Selection notification:** Early August 2026
- Organizations that are not selected may be eligible for a shorter LTA response and/or referral to other organizations
- Cohort runs **September 2026 – April 2027**

Program Overview

The Racial Health Equity Legal and Policy Cohort (RHE Cohort) is a biennial, national program that supports governments, public health departments, community-based organizations, and advocates in using law and policy as tools to advance racial health equity.

Background

2026-2027 RHE Cohort

Timeline

Impact

Apply Now

Eligible Organizations

- Local, state, or tribal health departments and other government agencies
- Community-based organizations
- Advocacy groups and coalitions
- Nonprofit organizations,
- Professional associations,
- Social services and healthcare agencies
- Others entitles working to eliminate deep, systemic, and racially driven inequities in health with desire to work on law and policy issues to advance community health and racial equity

Eligible Projects

Seeking applicants who are developing or working on a specific issue that prioritizes racial equity that would benefit from legal and policy technical assistance (up to 40 hours). We can assist with work that is at any stage of development.

We are interested in supporting projects that have most, if not all, of the following characteristics:

- Have a commitment and clear goals to furthering racial health equity
- Are committed to an intersectional approach to racial health equity
- Are grounded in principles of health equity and the priorities of communities that have experienced inequitable health disparities
- Are community-led or community informed
- Are led by entities that are engaged and working with communities either currently or that are seeking assistance with how to connect with communities
- Could be implemented in other jurisdictions or communities
- Have a well-defined legal/policy scope or would benefit from planning assistance to define the legal/policy scope
- Have a clear connection to improving population health.

Cohort Commitments & Expectations

To ensure a successful collaboration, applicants must make a commitment to:

- Work with your dedicated Network team to define the legal and policy focus of your project
- Identify at least one point of contact who and is available for monthly, or as-needed check-in meetings
- Attend webinars and facilitated discussions to learn about and engage with other cohort participants
- Review and give feedback on drafts of materials we create together
- Complete an evaluation at program close



Timeline

Application:

- **May 1, 2026: Call for applications opens**
- **June 26, 2026, 5pm CT: Applications due**
- **Early August: Applicants receive notification of acceptance/non-acceptance**

Legal and Policy Technical Assistance (7 months):

- **September 2026: Legal and policy technical assistance begins**
- **April 30, 2027: Legal and policy technical assistance ends**

Cohort Events:

- **Fall 2026: Welcome webinar; Virtual training on public health law and racial equity**
- **Spring 2027: Guided virtual facilitated discussion**

Evaluation:

- **May 2027 or sooner as projects end**

A decorative graphic on the left side of the slide. It features a large teal shape that looks like a stylized arrow pointing down and to the right. Below it is a smaller olive green shape that looks like a stylized arrow pointing up and to the right. The teal shape has a white cutout on its left side.

Legal TA Projects: A Closer Look at Cohort 2 (2024-2025)

COMMUNITY POWER BUILDING: King County, WA

 **The Network**
for Public Health Law

Ideas. Experience. Practical answers.



MECHANISMS FOR ADVANCING PUBLIC HEALTH
POLICY BRIEF

Community Power Building: King County, Washington

- **Goal discussions**
- **Policy Brief collaboration**
- **Continued connection**



Data Disaggregation in California

Partnered with health data equity advocacy organization

Initial phase:

- Focused on understanding data flow challenges, organizational needs, and opportunities for support

Research and resource development:

- Developed resources on public health authority for mortality data collection and data disaggregation privacy considerations

Project close:

- Presented findings to data disaggregation workgroup
- Continued connection and knowledge sharing



Overview of Texas Juvenile Justice System and Framework for Diversion & Deflection

- **Worked with local advocate and academic to increase access to alternatives to incarceration**
- **Created thorough guidance on Texas law**
- **Detailed preemption and home rule issues that may conflict with local alternatives to incarceration**

II. Diversion and Deflection

The terms “diversion” and “deflection” generally refer to mechanisms in a criminal legal process to encourage alternatives to incarceration and/or formal criminal outcomes.²³ These are not formal legal terms of art, so they may have different definitions or be used differently in different jurisdictions and contexts.

“Diversion” may be used as an umbrella term; however, in contrast to “deflection,” diversion more specifically refers to post-arrest, pre-trial interventions for someone already moving through the criminal process.²⁴ Diversionary programs typically involve participation in some resource, programming, or treatment, which, if successfully completed, results in the dismissal of charges.²⁵

For example, “drug courts” are one of the most common forms of diversion, available in 38 states and jurisdictions as of 2022: people facing certain drug charges may elect to delay trial and instead proceed in the drug court, an administrative body that requires the person to participate in some form of substance abuse treatment, oversees their treatment, and determines whether charges should be dismissed based on successful completion of treatment.²⁶

The RHE Cohort challenges the misconception that racial health equity work has stalled – it confronts it.

The **Racial Health Equity Legal and Policy Cohort (RHE Cohort)** from the Network for Public Health Law brings together public health and community organizations operating across many different landscapes to reimagine how legal and policy strategies dismantle systemic barriers that drive health inequities.

Through **shared learning** and **collaboration**, this national cohort is helping leaders:

- Obtain tailored, project-specific technical assistance to promote racial health equity
- Build legal and policy capacity for racial justice and health equity
- Navigate legal challenges and policy barriers with greater confidence
- Learn about, develop and use race-conscious and race-neutral policies and approaches
- Build relationships with peers across the country working toward anti-racist systems change
- Access ongoing legal and policy support through the Network

Join us as we continue this work – together.

Q&A





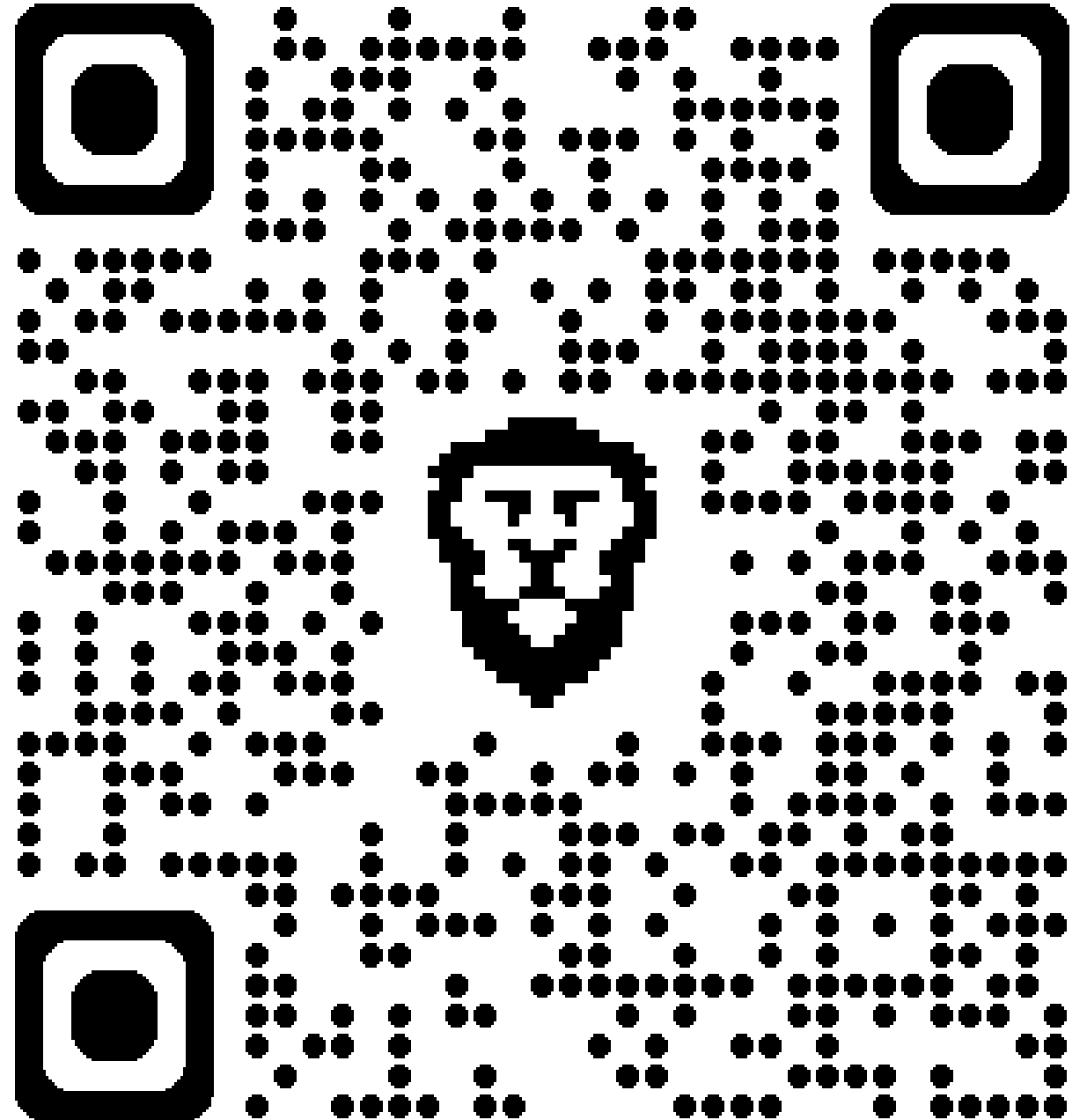
The Network
for Public Health Law

Next Steps

We recommend that you read the entire application guidelines before beginning your application!

Please share this opportunity with anyone you think would be a good fit for one of these projects.

Applications are due June 26th, 2026 at **5:00 p.m. CST**. Contact Sara Rogers at srogers@networkforphl.org with any questions about the program.



Thank you

