

Black Bodies, Black Health: Imagining a Just Racial Future

The COVID-19 pandemic brought to the fore the deadly consequences of racial disparities in health. More than spotlighting racial health inequity, however, the pandemic exposed anew the depths of staggering racial inequality nationwide. In every sector from education to the labor market, housing to healthcare, the provision to meet basic human needs and take steps to ensure wellness were racially unequal. These are national problems but as one of the most diverse states in the country, New Jersey holds several unwelcome distinctions for long-standing inequities in critical systems that have profound implications for vulnerability to poor health outcomes.

What would we learn from bringing humanists, social scientists, and biomedical researchers to the table to explore, unpack, and disrupt structural racism in service of creating equitable health outcomes? What would a just racial future require to remediate the imprints of the past in the structures of our present? This one-year research project brings together cross-disciplinary groups of experts to explore and unpack structural racism in service of creating equitable health outcomes, centering humanistic and social scientific approaches.

The Black Bodies, Black Health project will allocate \$300,000 to *seed grants* that incentivize humanists, social scientists, and biomedical researchers to engage in interdisciplinary work to explore and unpack structural racism in service of creating equitable health outcomes. Drawing on existing research and taking a local frame grounded in New Jersey, grantees will be asked to envision the work of disruption of structural racism, reimagining systems drawing from a range of fields and incorporating theoretical approaches. We are especially interested in two types of projects—humanities projects that draw the connections, historically and conceptually, between how understandings of race have directly and negatively impacted health treatments and outcomes in the United States; and social scientific or biomedical research projects that foreground the humanistic assumptions or implications of the work, are grounded in New Jersey, and focus on linking research in the following subject areas to broader questions of health and well-being: schools/education; poverty; child welfare; environmental justice; work/labor; housing; law enforcement, criminal justice and penal reform, which we envision as the structural underpinnings of health inequities.

The seed grant program has four aims: 1) identify Rutgers faculty members whose scholarship and expertise is tied to one of the dimensions of structural racism impacting health that we aim to explore; 2) spur the intentional translation of field-specific knowledge and cutting-edge research on vexing questions into digestible insights for the benefit of the general public; 3) encourage the engagement of community members in producing knowledge on both the impact of structural racism and its solutions; incorporating humanistic and social scientific methods such as storytelling, ethnography, community curation and digital archiving; 4) develop a position paper that outlines the research promise, avenues for interdisciplinary exploration as well as possible policy solutions or interventions to reduce structural racism in their respective area.

The seed grants awardees will be invited to attend two internal (Rutgers affiliated) interdisciplinary workshops in spring 2022. The first will center the analysis of humanistic scholarship on deep history of “difference” and its impact on race-thinking. The second, will identify themes and refine field vexing questions emerging from their respective projects that will guide the external expert workshop. Both the internal and external workshops will include a strong systems informed analysis of the ways the different

forms of research (humanistic—historical, linguistic and representational; social scientific—policy oriented, using quantitative and qualitative research methods) could be integrated and brought together as the foundation for imagining new areas of research that spans scholarly, legal and policy arenas. Grant recipients will be asked to produce position papers by the summer of 2022 reflecting their expert input on strategies to create a just racial future.

This project aims to produce convergent knowledge, identifying themes that can inform future research directions and investments, and will likely generate new interdisciplinary research areas. Gathering together diverse, disciplinary based, scholarly communities that are all wrestling with the broader question of how to advance racial justice, this intervention offers a site and a frame for generating knowledge that has the potential to be transformative.

Application:

- Applications are due on **January 31, 2022** and should include the following information:
 - A two-page project description (including primary and secondary audiences) that explains the following:
 1. How does your project further the goals of the Black Bodies, Black Health Research Project?
 2. A one-page budget with specific line items. (What project activities/personnel require funding, and in what form—research funds, course buyouts?)
 3. Name and contact information.
- Awardees will be notified by **February 15, 2022**.

Submission:

- Applications may be submitted electronically via the online Application Form located on the ISGRJ website at <https://globalracialjustice.rutgers.edu>