

# COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT INSTITUTE

## The 3rd Annual Community Engagement Institute: “The Journey to Justice: Expanding the Possibilities”

On Friday, October 14, 2016, the third Community Engagement Institute was held at the Birmingham Jefferson Convention Center Complex in the East Meeting Rooms. The morning kicked off with a very exciting poster presentation session that spanned topics such as rural HIV collaborative networks and cognitive changes in young breast cancer survivors. Participants perused the room, viewing posters and talking with the presenters. Poster judges also worked the room, interacting with presenters and scoring both their visual and verbal presentations.



University of Montevallo Assistant Professor, Dr. Jermaine Mitchell



Poster presenters and attendees at the 3rd Annual CEI

Following the morning poster session, Mr. Kevin Powell delivered a powerful presentation describing his personal journey to justice juxtaposed against four decades plus of tumultuous American history. Comparing 2016 to the civil rights watershed year 1968, he called for “courageous conversations” and greater “empathy and compassion” to get beyond the racist, sexist, and socioeconomic stereotyping underlying the violence in our country. “Justice,” he said, “must be inclusive of everyone’s culture.”

Immediately following Mr. Powell’s address, participants were able to purchase his book, *The Education of Kevin Powell: A Boy’s Journey into Manhood*, meet Powell, and have their books signed during the CEI’s networking session.



Following the book signing, participants could choose between two breakout sessions: one focused on cultural values related to community health and the other helped participants explore their implicit biases.

### **Session #1: Ending the Fights and Failures for Community Health**

This session was designed to examine methods to define cultural values of groups and to develop pluralistic messages that unite different groups of people. Session participants were asked to respond to the question “What separates us?” *“When truth threatens our cultural values,”* stated Dr. Frank Franklin, *“hyper-communication only hardens our resistance and increases our willingness to support alternative arguments, no matter how lacking in evidence.”*



Dr. Frank Franklin leading a discussion on community health



Activist and Minister T. Marie King leading a session on implicit biases

## Session #2: Exposing Your Personal Biases

This session engaged participants in identification of their own personal biases. The question: "How do you feel when you interact with..." was the first of a series of introspective questions posed by Ms. King. King challenged participants to reflect on the necessity of understanding their personal biases before being able to help others. *"It's only through relationships and building those relationships that biases are corrected,"* stated King.

Rep. Jeramey Anderson, the youngest African American ever elected to a U.S. legislative body when he won a seat in the Mississippi House of Representatives in 2013, explored the role of justice in "making America exceptional" in his keynote presentation at lunch. "Justice is giving every child a shot, no matter their zip code, because justice is not only the absence of oppression, but the presence of opportunity" he said. He noted that "with the \$80 billion spent annually to keep people incarcerated in the U.S. we could have universal pre-k for every child in this country, when every dollar we invest doubles in value."



In the afternoon, participants could choose between breakout sessions that focused on examining the root causes of urban blight or learning about a youth activist program at Rust College in Holly Springs, Mississippi.



### Session #3: Greenhouses of Hope: Cultivating Youth for Social Justice at Rust College

Panelists introduced attendees to the Greenhouses of Hope framework, a 10-day immersion experience focused on leadership, health disparities, and connecting these concepts to social justice and career interest. Session attendees were able to see firsthand the effort required to launch and sustain an initiative at an academic institution. Elizabeth Williams, Associate Professor at Tennessee State University and project lead, stated *"there is a genuine embracing of youth and young adults. Greenhouses of Hope looks for ways to identify and use those gifts."*



Dr. Elizabeth Williams with Greenhouses of Hope



UAB SOPH Dean Dr. Max Michael facilitating a session

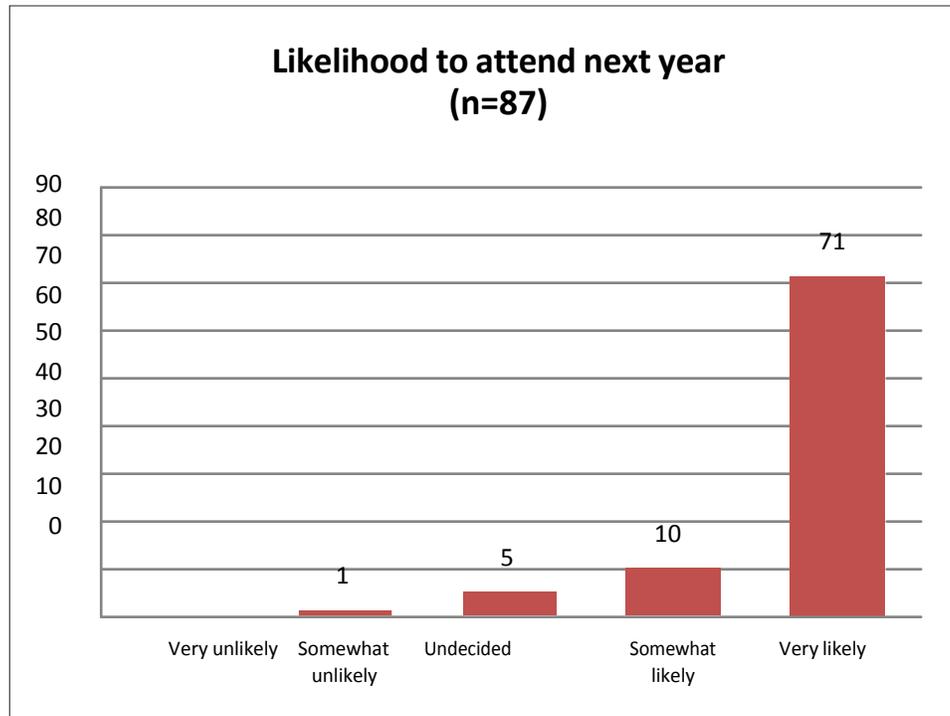
### Session #4: Urban Blight: The Uber Disease

This session focused on the urban health disadvantage in the context of urban blight. Attendees learned that Birmingham is the 49th largest metro region and there are economic consequences to urban blight such as disrupted neighborhoods, social disintegration, higher chronic disease burden, and more unemployment. Historical issues influencing blight were also discussed, such as redlining and mortgage loan discrimination to racial and ethnic minorities. Translation of knowledge in a timely manner and long-term investment in communities were solution-focused topics. One attendee commented *"the things that make us successful are the things that make us most uncomfortable."*

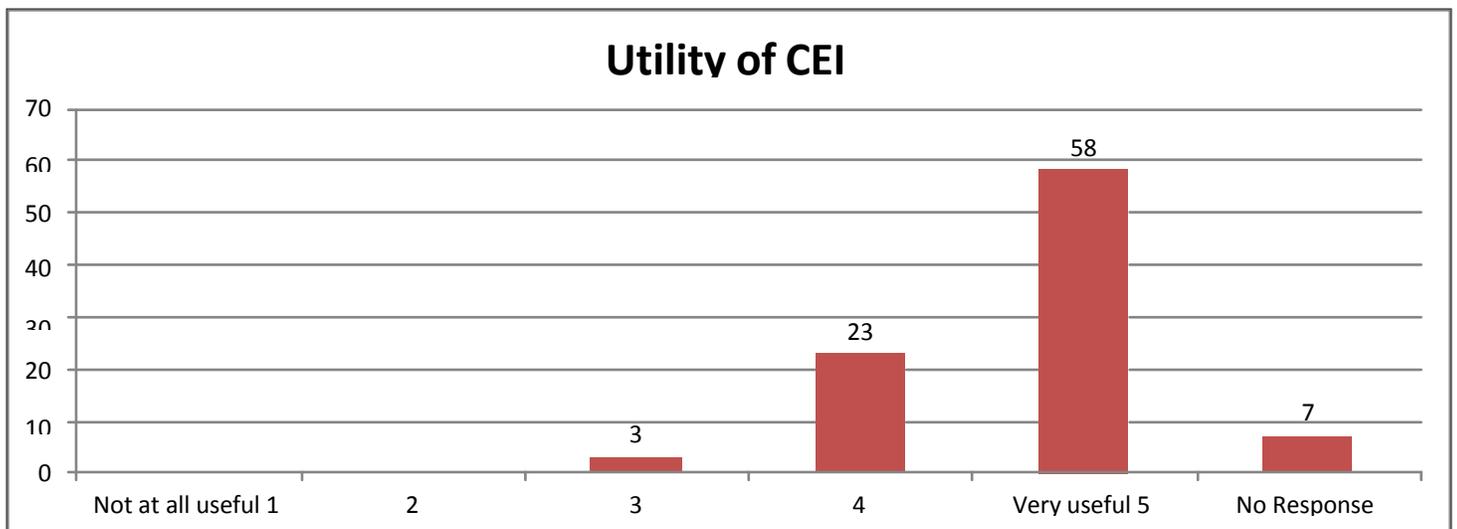
**We are always interested in your feedback.** Here's what we heard and what you'd like to see more of at the 2017 Community Engagement Institute:

1. You thoroughly enjoyed the keynote speakers. You found them inspiring, refreshing, and honest in their presentations. Be sure to check out the full videos of both Kevin Powell and Rep. Jeramey Anderson presentations. Everything can be found on our Facebook page - Community Engagement Institute.
2. You really like the networking environment of CEI. You found the Institute was a great way to connect and learn what others were doing. Be sure to let your networks know about next year's event and that they will not want to miss the 2017 CEI.
3. We're always looking for ways to improve and enhance the CEI experience. One thing you said you wanted was to create "interest groups" and provide networking prompts based on individual's interests. Great idea! We hear you and will be thinking about how to make that happen.
4. Some areas of focus that you suggested for next year's event include economic development and community engagement, cultural competency, and inclusiveness. You also want to see topics focused on people with disabilities and different evaluation methods to measure community engagement. Whew! Those are just a few of the many suggestions you gave. We'll be pondering over every single one of them to see what we can come up with for the 2017 Institute.

Looks like we're on the hook for a 2017 CEI! Many of you said that you'll definitely be back next year. **We'll see you then!**



You also approve of the utility of the CEI, which is great. That means we're providing you with information you can actually use (which is why you'll be back in 2017)



We are forever grateful to our sponsors for their generous support of this program. **See you in 2017!**

