

Fellowship Overview

The San Diego County COMMUNITY Incubator Network (KIN) Postdoctoral Fellowship at University of California, San Diego (UC San Diego) is a health equity-centered two-year training program that supports postdoctoral scholars in co-leading research alongside community partners. This program is co-led by [Herbert Wertheim School of Public Health and Human Longevity Science](#) and [Center for Community Health](#) at UC San Diego and works in partnership with [YMCA of San Diego County](#) and [San Diego County Childhood Obesity Initiative Community Council](#). The fellowship will serve a total of six fellows between 2025-2029. Fellows will be invited to collaborate with community-based organizations (CBOs) to co-create research that supports food justice efforts. These partnerships will emerge through mutual trust, shared priorities, and community consent. The fellow's role is to contribute research tools, methods, and capacity in service of community-defined goals, not to take over or redirect efforts.

This program is intended to challenge traditional academic norms by integrating trained and lived expertise, fostering alternative career pathways beyond academia, and prioritizing mutual learning between academic and community mentors. The objective is to enable fellows to emerge as confident, reflective leaders prepared to translate research into policy, practice, and community action. This program is part of a broader vision to seed a community-driven research ecosystem that transforms how health equity is advanced in San Diego County and beyond. Fellows are not only researchers, but also bridge-builders, advocates, and changemakers who help shift institutions toward justice and belonging.

This program is funded by the American Heart Association and Robert Wood Johnson Foundation and is part of the national [Health Equity Research Networks](#) (HERN).

Program Guiding Principles

- **Reciprocity:** Knowledge, power, and resources are shared between fellows, mentors, and communities.
- **Humility:** Fellows are supported in cultivating curiosity, grounded leadership, and a willingness to learn across differences.
- **Compassion & Care:** The work honors humanity, healing, and sustainability for fellows and communities.
- **Equity in Practice:** Community mentors and reviewers are compensated equitably; community leadership is central to all decision-making.
- **Flexibility & Responsiveness:** The program evolves through ongoing co-design with fellows and community partners.
- **Community-Led First:** CBOs are already leading food justice efforts. Fellows are invited as collaborators and learners, not to direct or control.
- **Opt-In Collaboration:** CBOs are never required or expected to partner with a fellow. Partnerships emerge through mutual interest and respect.
- **Shared Power, Not Assumed Roles:** Fellows are trained to engage reflexively and equitably with communities. Academic credentials do not equal leadership by default.

Program Core Components

ELEMENT	KEY FEATURES
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Dual Mentorship	Each fellow is matched with both an academic mentor and a community-based mentor. Mentors are supported with onboarding and resources to foster reciprocal, power-aware co-learning.
Embedded Research	Fellows may collaborate with a CBO on research aligned with community priorities. These partnerships are co-created, flexible, and driven by community interest, not imposed. Research activities are designed to amplify community work, not redirect it.
Training Curriculum	Includes offerings in food justice, community-based participatory research, structural racism, policy advocacy, data sovereignty, qualitative and participatory methods, and storytelling.
Co-learning Space	Monthly shared learning sessions with other fellows, mentors, and CBOs create space for reflection, dialogue, and integration of academic and community wisdom.
Strengths-based IDP	Individual Development Plans (IDPs) center strengths, lived experience, and growth goals, supporting fellows in charting non-linear, equity-driven career paths.
Community Partnership Development	Fellows are supported to build authentic, power-aware partnerships with CBOs. All collaborations are opt-in and based on mutual respect, shared priorities, and equity. Fellows are invited into community-led work, not expected to lead it.
Expanded Career Supports	Fellows are supported in pursuing academic and non-academic pathways (e.g., public health, philanthropy, organizing, policy).

Eligibility & Selection Criteria

- Doctoral degree in public health, food systems, social sciences, humanities, or related field.
- Demonstrated commitment to health equity and community-engaged research through lived experience, advocacy, research, or service.
- Committed to ethical, power-aware partnerships with communities and who understand research as a tool in service of community-defined goals.
- Preferred: Non-traditional contributions (e.g., policy work, organizing, storytelling, co-created advocacy and/or research tools),
- Encouraged: Candidates from diverse backgrounds who may be underrepresented in academia.
- *Individuals pursuing clinical fellowships and residencies are not eligible to apply.

Training Program Deliverables & Outcomes

- Fellows are expected to develop a balanced portfolio of academic, community, and institutional products, shaped by their Individual Development Plans (IDPs), community partnerships, and career goals. Expectations are developmental and not volume-based.
 - **Academic Examples:** Peer-reviewed publications (open-access when possible), curricula, national conference presentations, or grant proposals.
 - **Community Examples:** Toolkits, policy briefs, storytelling products, evaluation tools, curricula, or other community-benefiting outputs co-created with partners.
 - **Institutional & Systems Examples:** Participation in shaping equity-driven training models through tool development, framework testing, shared documentation, and institutional learning.