

2016 NBCC Post-Conference Attendee Update

October 2016

Thank you for sharing your feedback on the 2016 NBCC! In addition to the online attendee survey, we have connected with many stakeholders in the past couple of months to gather a variety of perspectives on the conference's format and content and hear firsthand about participants' experiences.

Although the session ratings were largely positive, it is important to acknowledge attendees' varied experiences. Many of you left with strong feelings across a broad spectrum of "aha" moments and pain points, and we are grateful that you have taken the time to share these with us. Your input is critical to inform the planning of future conferences and virtual learning opportunities for all of us working collaboratively to build the "landscape of breastfeeding support."

Representing the breadth and depth of the "First Food" field, you bring diverse viewpoints and expectations about how to best approach implementation of our shared agenda. In recent years, the USBC has made an unwavering commitment to centering equity at the core of our efforts to "be the national collective voice for breastfeeding" and at the core of our organizational structures and practices. This has meant moving upstream and intentionally naming and addressing the many existing barriers to equity, both within and beyond our "walls." Our national member organization representatives have been on this journey with us, and with their guidance and support, we have been steadily transforming the USBC.

We have looked to several sources to define what we mean by equity, ultimately combining them into the following definition comprised of three interwoven components: a lens, a mirror, and an outcome.

- It is a **lens** through which we view the world to inform and guide the design of our strategies and activities to build a "landscape of breastfeeding support."
- It is also a **mirror** through which we view ourselves and our organizations, examining our internal structures, culture, and policies and their impact on how the lens is applied and the outcome achieved.
- Lastly it is the **outcome** we seek to achieve, i.e., equity is realized when life outcomes are equal, in a statistical sense, regardless of one's identities.

Equity work can take the form of actions designed to address historic burdens as well as to remove present day barriers to equal opportunities. It can be accomplished by identifying and eliminating systemic discriminatory policies and practices, but also by transforming structures towards access, justice, self-determination, redistribution, and sharing of power and resources. Above all, it requires an inclusive approach that maximizes engagement of the communities impacted.

This conference theme focused not just on equity, but also on "community engagement," a concept that can also generate many varied perceptions without a common definition of the term. We have therefore defined **Community Engagement** in reference to how we engage community members directly in the work of policy & practice change to build a "landscape of breastfeeding support." See the [Spectrum of Community Engagement](#).

We were thrilled to welcome many new voices at the conference not previously included at the USBC table, and we are encouraged every day to hear how this is happening at the state and local coalition tables as well. This is community engagement in action! With this rapid expansion of our community, it is critical that we remain open to hearing diverse voices, and especially listening deeply to new ones. Often the deepest levels of understanding and growth come through dialogue with those who bring new and different perspectives to our attention.

As we individually and collectively gain greater levels of understanding about how institutional and structural racism impact our field, it is to be expected that we may experience some discomfort. Your partnership will be key in creating safe spaces for everyone at various points along their learning journey, while also normalizing the fact that this work is hard and will require a long-term sustained commitment. With this in mind, we wanted to share with you our intentions to continue to build this community while also increasing support to better “hold” the equity work within this community. To ensure future conferences are vibrant, inclusive spaces that foster deep learning and sharing, we have a number of actions planned to redesign the 2017 NBCC:

- Reformat schedule/program to keep full group together throughout the event (instead of having a pre-conference workshop day where only some opt in to attend); ensure program is balanced between the following three content areas, each with a focus on translation of learning and conceptual frameworks into action and application with tools:
 - deep dive equity training w/ facilitators,
 - peer sharing opportunities, and
 - coalition building skills.
- Clearly define and support the conference’s focus on equity in presenter guidelines and session moderator orientation/training.
- Create opportunities for peer sharing about the progress being made by member organizations and coalitions in dismantling structures and practices that perpetuate inequity.
- Plan and facilitate time for caucusing in identity groups, as well as in groups based on stages of one’s personal equity learning journey (each enters where comfortable).
- Embed more time for dialogue and reflection so we can look at our own actions, inactions, and interactions; adjust our practices; and bolster relationships.
- Set clear expectations about the focus of the conference and invite a collective commitment from attendees to the community norms.

The learning and sharing continues online long after the conference ends! If you haven’t already, please explore our [online learning communities](#) on breastfeeding-related topic areas from the SGCTA and beyond, and join those of greatest interest to you. Conference attendees are especially encouraged to check out the following:

- Coalitions Learning Connection: usbreastfeeding.org/coalitions-connect
- Racial Equity Learning Community: usbreastfeeding.org/equity-community
- Collective Impact Learning Community: usbreastfeeding.org/CI-community

We look forward to our continued work together and to seeing you in 2017!