



Aligning for Equity: Translating Insights into Actionable Tools for Shifting Power Dynamics

Georgia Health Policy Center

TABLE OF CONTENTS

- Background and Evolution of the 3
- Aligning work 3
- Process and Methodology 4
- About the Community-Led Aligning Toolkit 6
 - Interactive Learning Features 7
 - Audience and Use Cases 7
 - Intended Impact..... 7
 - Access..... 8
- Lessons Learned and Insights Gained 8
- Impact and Dissemination 9
- Conclusion and Future Direction 9

BACKGROUND AND EVOLUTION OF THE ALIGNING WORK

The Aligning for Equity project represents the capstone of the Aligning Systems for Health initiative, a multiyear collaboration between the Georgia Health Policy Center (GHPC) at Georgia State University and the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation (RWJF). Launched in 2019, this initiative sought to understand how communities, health systems, and policymakers can more effectively align their efforts to create equitable conditions for health and well-being.

The Aligning Systems for Health initiative emerged from RWJF's broader vision of building a Culture of Health, where everyone has a fair and just opportunity to achieve well-being. Early work revealed that while collaboration across health care, public health, and social services was widely recognized as essential, these systems are often misaligned — operating in silos, governed by different incentives, and shaped by unequal power relations.

Across multiple phases — Aligning 1.0, Aligning Federal Funds, Aligning in Crisis, and Aligning for Equity — the work explored how purpose, data, governance, and financing can be shared across sectors to drive systemic change. Over time, a consistent theme emerged: sustainably aligning across sectors requires confronting and shifting underlying power dynamics that determine who defines priorities, controls resources, and shapes outcomes.



Through the Aligning 1.0 and Aligning Federal Funds projects, GHPC and its partners examined how these elements manifest in practice and how they can be strengthened. Aligning in Crisis, launched during the COVID-19 pandemic, revealed how relationships, trust, and shared governance could accelerate response and resilience when systems faced collective strain.

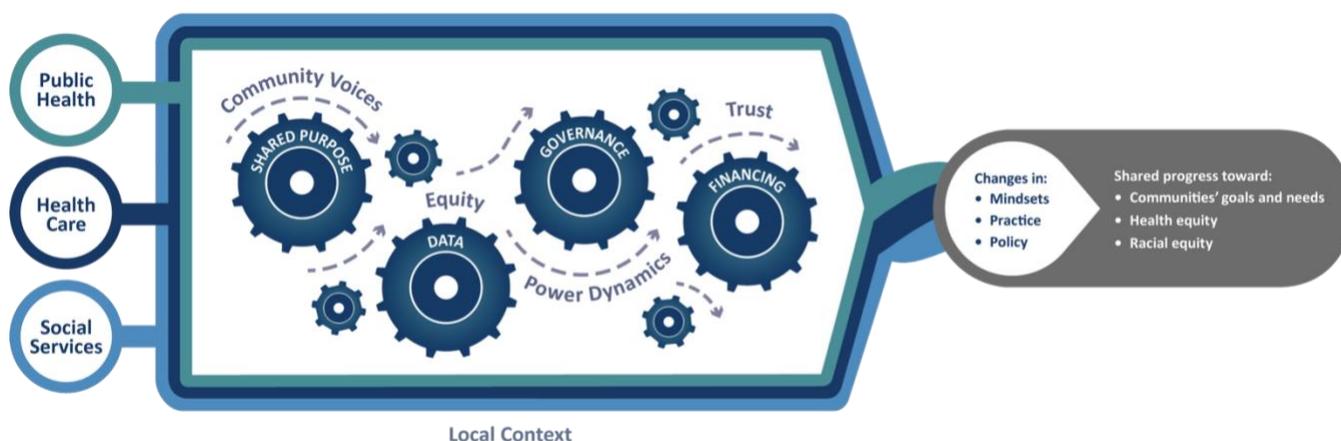
Aligning for Equity deepened this focus, engaging community organizations, funders, and individuals with lived experience to identify how equity, power, and trust operate in real cross-sector partnerships. The project's goal was to translate the lessons of aligning across sectors into actionable tools and resources that enable practitioners, funders, and policymakers to act differently — not only to align systems, but to align them equitably.

Aligning for Equity centered community wisdom, emphasizing that equitable systems are built when those most affected by inequities shape the strategies for addressing them. Aligning for Equity was the natural evolution of this journey — moving beyond alignment as coordination toward alignment as transformation.

The [Framework for Aligning Sectors](#), developed through this work, identified four structural components essential for aligning across sectors:

- Shared Purpose – A unifying vision grounded in equity and community priorities.
- Shared Data – Transparent, accessible information that drives learning and accountability.
- Shared Governance – Structures that elevate community voice and distribute decision-making power.
- Shared Financing – Resource flows that reflect shared responsibility and mutual benefit.

Figure 1. A Framework for Aligning Sectors



This framework also highlighted adaptive factors that enable success — community voice, equity, power, and trust — emphasizing that authentic collaboration and shared decision-making are central to transformation.

The culmination of this work is a user-centered, interactive learning resource — The [Community-Led Aligning Toolkit](#) — that distills years of research, community engagement, and practice-based insight into accessible, practical guidance for the field.

PROCESS AND METHODOLOGY

The Aligning for Equity culminating project was guided by a collaborative, multiphased process that combined rigorous analysis with participatory engagement. GHPC conducted a comprehensive review of data, reflections, and evaluation inputs gathered from across the Aligning portfolio to identify common themes around race, power, equity, and governance.

Phase 1: Synthesis and Analysis – Researchers mined six years of qualitative and quantitative data from multiple Aligning-related projects, identifying patterns in how organizations approached power sharing, collaboration, and community engagement. These analyses

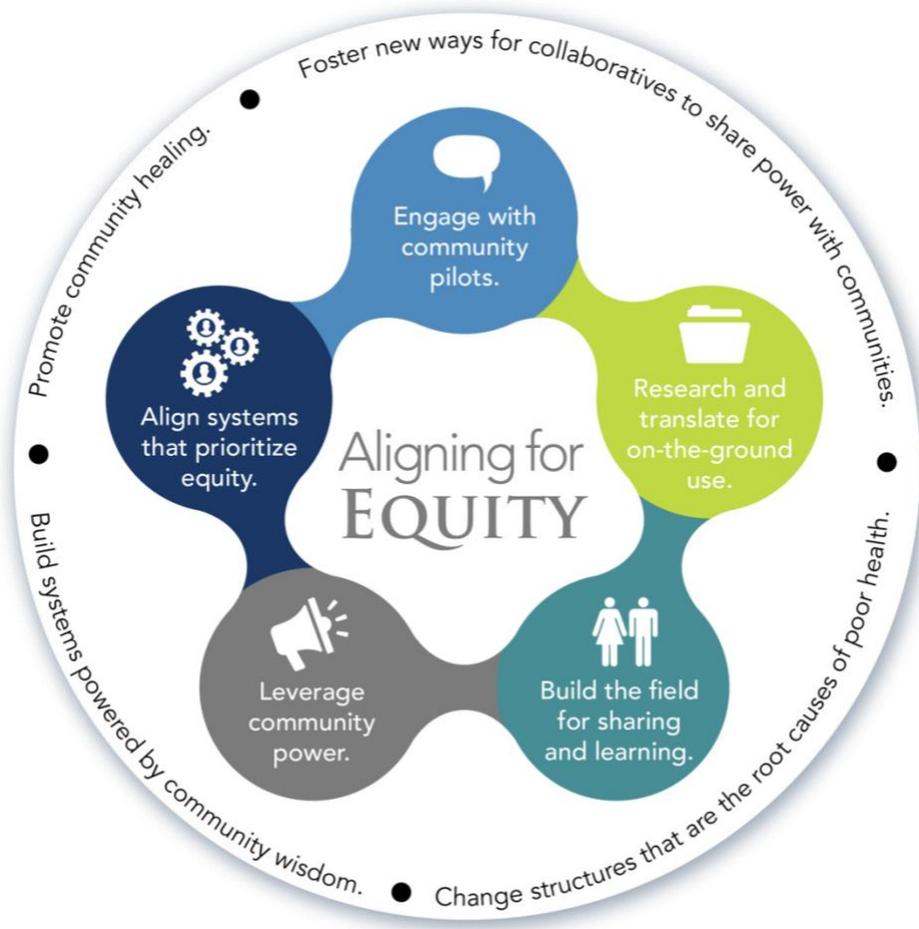
produced a set of cross-cutting insights about what enables or hinders equitably aligning across sectors.

Phase 2: Community Sensemaking – GHPC convened community partners in sensemaking sessions to collectively interpret these findings. These sessions surfaced critical perspectives on how power operates within systems and what it takes to create authentic shared governance.

Phase 3: Translation into Practice – The insights from these sessions informed the design of the Community-Led Aligning Toolkit, a multimedia tool that connects research findings to practical guidance.

The Final Product: Community-Led Aligning Toolkit

Figure 2. Aligning for Equity Overview



ABOUT THE COMMUNITY-LED ALIGNING TOOLKIT

The Community-Led Aligning Toolkit interactive learning module is a multimedia educational tool developed by GHPC to translate the Framework for Aligning Sectors into accessible, actionable learning for both community partners and institutional leaders. This module is designed as an immersive experience that helps users explore what equitable alignment looks like in practice — how cross-sector partners can move from collaboration to co-ownership.

The toolkit serves as both a learning and reflection tool, helping individuals and organizations operationalize the concepts of shared purpose, shared governance, shared data, and shared financing. It brings to life the idea that equity must be intentionally embedded across all aspects of aligning work, not added as an afterthought. Through interactive activities, storytelling, and guided application, participants are invited to reflect on their own organizational practices and reimagine how they engage communities as equal partners in systems change.



The learning experience is organized into a series of interconnected sections that mirror the core components of the Framework for Aligning Sectors:

- Introduction and Context – Provides an overview of the Aligning Systems for Health initiative, including its history, goals, and the role of RWJF in advancing a Culture of Health.
- Shared Purpose – Explores how partners can build collective intent grounded in equity and mutual accountability, including examples of communities that have redefined success through inclusive goal-setting.
- Shared Data – Demonstrates how equitable data sharing goes beyond metrics — centering transparency, accessibility, and the interpretation of data in ways that honor lived experience.
- Shared Governance – Guides users through practical approaches for shifting power, creating decision-making structures that elevate community voice, and developing mutual trust between institutional and community partners.



- Shared Financing – Examines financing models that prioritize sustainability, transparency, and community benefit, illustrating how funding decisions can reinforce or dismantle inequity.
- Adaptive Factors – Are interwoven throughout each section and include the themes of community voice, equity, power, and trust — factors that determine whether alignment efforts are merely cooperative or truly transformative.

Interactive Learning Features

Each section integrates reflective questions, applicable case studies to bring the content into the real world, and resources to further explore each component. Participants can:

- Engage in guided reflections that prompt them to assess how their systems currently align — or fail to align — with equitable practices.
- Explore toolkits, discussion guides, and resource links embedded throughout the module support direct application of lessons in their own settings.
- Receive practical prompts to initiate conversations within teams or networks about rebalancing power and creating inclusive structures.

Audience and Use Cases

The Community-Led Aligning Toolkit was designed for a broad audience, including:

- Community-based organizations seeking to deepen their role as equal partners in aligning initiatives.
- Public health, health care, and social service professionals working to operationalize equity across systems.
- Funders and policymakers interested in understanding how investments can promote shared decision-making and sustainability.
- Researchers and evaluators exploring participatory approaches to systems change.

Case Study: Shared Purpose



Intended Impact

By pairing systems-thinking with equity-centered practice, the Community-Led Aligning Toolkit equips users with the knowledge, language, and tools to foster enduring partnerships rooted in fairness and trust. It reinforces that equity is not a static goal but a continuous practice of

reflection, redistribution, and accountability. Ultimately, this resource helps build a shared understanding of how communities and institutions can align their efforts to create conditions where everyone can thrive.

Access

The module is available online through GHPC's [Articulate 360 platform](#).

The Community-Led Aligning Toolkit represents the synthesis of the entire Aligning portfolio. It invites users into an interactive learning journey that explores what it takes to equitably align across sectors.

Key features include:

- Framework Application – An accessible walkthrough of the Framework for Aligning Sectors, focusing on shared purpose, data, governance, and financing, with practical prompts for reflection.
- Lived Experience Integration – Real stories and scenarios that illustrate how communities navigate power, equity, and trust in practice.
- Interactive Exercises – Clickable decision pathways and reflective questions that allow users to test strategies and explore real-world challenges to aligning across sectors.
- Practical Tools and Resources – Embedded toolkits, checklists, and discussion guides that help translate concepts into action.
- Adaptability – Designed for self-guided use, team training, or institutional workshops, ensuring broad accessibility.

LESSONS LEARNED AND INSIGHTS GAINED

1. The retrospective analysis across the Aligning portfolio revealed several overarching lessons for the field:
2. Power must be shared, not shifted.
3. Community voice is foundational to system change.
4. Equity requires structural, not symbolic, commitment.
5. Learning is a collective practice.
6. Practical tools bridge the gap between knowledge and action.

IMPACT AND DISSEMINATION

The Aligning for Equity project extends beyond research — it has catalyzed a network of practitioners and funders who are now embedding these principles into ongoing work. GHPC has shared findings and tools across conferences, community collaboratives, and national partnerships, contributing to a shared vocabulary for equitably aligning across sectors.

The interactive module serves as both a training resource and a toolkit for continued reference and is adaptable for use in community-based organizations, funder networks, and policymaking contexts. By making the materials open-source and accessible online, GHPC ensures that the tools and lessons generated through this body of work will continue to inform the field long after the project's conclusion.

CONCLUSION AND FUTURE DIRECTION

The completion of Aligning for Equity marks both a culmination and a beginning. Over six years, the Aligning portfolio has demonstrated that aligning across systems is not just a technical challenge — it is a relational, cultural, and moral one. Through this work, GHPC and RWJF helped the field recognize that aligning equitably is built on shared purpose, shared power, and shared accountability.

The final deliverable — The Community-Led Aligning Toolkit — captures the essence of this journey. Although researchers and others may find value in this offering, it was specifically designed with community leaders in mind.

This tool translates the lessons of research, practice, and partnership into tools that help community leaders act with intention, humility, and hope.

As GHPC looks ahead, the findings and resources from this work will continue to inform initiatives that bridge sectors, center communities, and build systems that serve everyone more justly. The legacy of Aligning for Equity lies not only in what was learned, but in what will continue to grow from it — a national movement toward systems aligning across sectors grounded in equity, trust, and shared purpose.

Georgia Health Policy
Center

Georgia State University
Andrew Young School of Policy Studies



Georgia Health Policy Center
Andrew Young School of Policy Studies
Georgia State University
ghpc.gsu.edu