

Joint Center for Political and Economic Studies

Washington, D.C.

www.jointcenter.org

Established 1970

Q: If foundations could know one thing about the Joint Center, what would it be?

A: The Joint Center for Political and Economic Studies is the nation's oldest think tank addressing the needs of communities of color, having been founded in 1970 to serve the then-nascent Congressional Black Caucus as well as elected officials of color at all levels of governments. Today, the Joint Center builds upon this rich history by conducting innovative research and policy analysis, convening stakeholders across an array of sectors and building leadership in communities of color, all with the goal of creating a more equitable, inclusive and pluralistic society. We believe this is important, given rapid demographic change and the fact that our nation's security, prosperity and international leadership depend upon our ability to harness the talents and creativity of all of our residents.

Q: How does your commitment to fostering minority political leadership fit into your overarching mission?

A: Building the capacity of leaders of color is an important aspect of our work to expand opportunity for all and to close racial and ethnic gaps in health, wealth, political participation and access to technology, among other issues. These leaders are particularly attuned to the needs of their communities and are well-positioned to dismantle the structural barriers that prevent many from achieving their full potential. We arm leaders with data, policy analysis and innovative, evidence-based policy

ideas that help them more effectively advocate for communities that have historically faced discrimination and marginalization.

Q: What aspect of your work do you believe is making the greatest change?

A: The Joint Center is proud to have helped catalyze positive change on many issues over the years, but is perhaps best known today for its innovative work to advance health equity through initiatives such as PLACE MATTERS. Begun in 2006 with the generous support of the W.K. Kellogg Foundation, PLACE MATTERS seeks to build the capacity of leaders and communities around the country to address social, economic and environmental conditions that shape health. PLACE MATTERS has been at the forefront of a new wave of research and action that recognizes that the spaces and places where people live, work, study and play often dictate which groups are healthy and which are

unhealthy. Because of persistently high levels of residential segregation, the places where people of color live and work tend to host a high concentration of health risks, such as environmental degradation, while lacking geographic access to health-enhancing resources, such as healthful foods, safe spaces for exercise and recreation, and even doctors and hospitals. PLACE MATTERS teams around the country have worked successfully to de-concentrate health risks and build health-enhancing resources in communities of color while applying a racial equity lens to help key audiences understand the structures and systems that tend to perpetuate and maintain racial inequality, such as residential segregation.

Q: What tips would you offer foundations interested in becoming effective supporters of the kind of work you do?

A: Foundations working to advance racial equity should 1) develop a long-term agenda, recognizing that the legacy of more than 300 years of state-sanctioned racial discrimination and marginalization will not be erased in just a few years; 2) look to tackle the structures and systems that replicate inequality, such as residential segregation, rather than merely addressing their consequences; 3) directly engage with affected communities; and 4) build indigenous leadership that will elevate the voices of these communities. Doing so will help to ensure that an increasingly diverse America remains strong and prosperous. ■



Col. Emma Coulson, Congressman Keith Ellison and Felicia Eames at a Joint Center event.