U.S. Department of Health and Human Services
Office of Minority Health

# HBCU Private Partnerships and Funding Readiness Guide

Insights and Best Practices from the August 2026 HBCU Listening Session

# Table of Contents


LISTENING SESSION OVERVIEW ..... 2

READINESS ROADMAP ..... 3

STAGE 1 | ALIGN ..... 4

STAGE 2 | CONNECT ..... 5

STAGE 3 | PREPARE ..... 7

STAGE 4 | PURSUE ..... 8

STAGE 5 | SUSTAIN ..... 9

FROM READINESS TO RESULTS ..... 10

RESOURCES ..... 11



## LISTENING SESSION OVERVIEW

On August 26, 2026, the U.S. Department of Health & Human Services (HHS) Office of Minority Health (OMH) convened a virtual listening session with Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs) in support of Executive Order 14283, The White House Initiative to Promote Excellence and Innovation at HBCUs. The session brought together 135 attendees, including 110 representatives from 45 HBCUs with health or health-related programs. The discussion explored how institutions are advancing health education, research, workforce development, and community well-being, as well as opportunities to strengthen and expand this work. Within that broader context, the listening session focused on two primary topics: strategies and best practices for developing private-sector partnerships that advance health-related initiatives, and challenges and promising approaches for successfully competing for HHS funding opportunities.

The conversation first examined how HBCUs can build partnerships around shared priorities, trust, and benefits for institutions, partners, students, and communities. Examples ranged from health-career pipelines and clinical training to community services, research opportunities, workforce placements, academic programs, facilities, equipment, and personnel. Across these approaches, enduring partnerships reflected shared purpose, joint planning, and value that continued beyond an initial activity or investment.

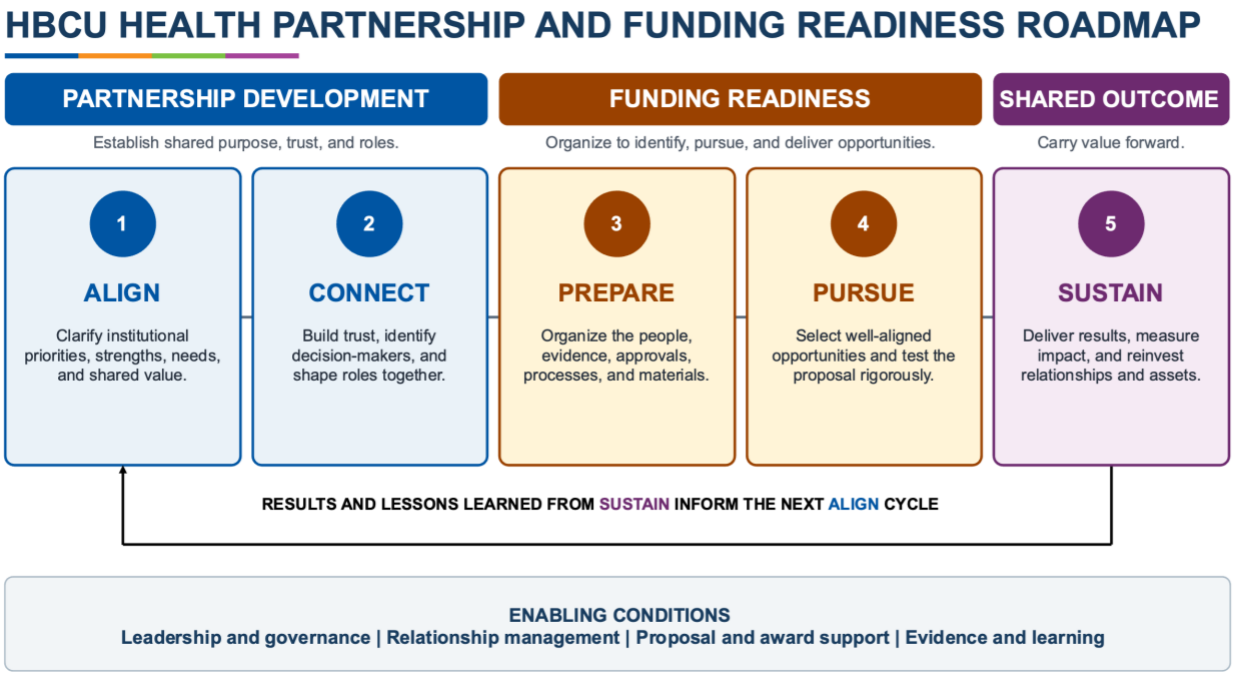
The discussion then turned to practices that position HBCUs to pursue HHS grants and contracts. Leadership support, faculty mentoring, sponsored research services, advance planning, partner engagement, and evidence from existing programs can strengthen proposal and award readiness. Short application periods, limited staff capacity, and eligibility requirements underscore the value of preparing early, choosing opportunities deliberately, and assembling teams with expertise from across and beyond the institution.

These themes point to practical ways HBCUs can strengthen partnerships, prepare for funding opportunities, and connect their strengths with relevant resources and collaborators. The sections that follow organize those insights into a roadmap and

practices that can be adapted to each institution's mission, priorities, and operating environment.[1]

## READINESS ROADMAP

The **HBCU Health Partnership and Funding Readiness Roadmap** brings the session's key practices into a single framework. It shows how partnership development and funding readiness progress through distinct but connected stages that support sustainable results.




The process begins with **ALIGN**, when an institution identifies a mission-driven priority and clarifies the strengths and value it brings to a shared effort. That foundation supports **CONNECT**, where the institution builds trust with potential partners, engages the appropriate decision-makers, and defines roles around a common purpose.

As relationships take shape, the focus expands to funding readiness. During **PREPARE**, the institution assembles the contributors, evidence, approvals,

[1] **About This Resource:** The practices presented are intended for informational purposes and may be adapted at each institution's discretion based on its needs and circumstances. They do not represent a required or definitive standard, nor does their use guarantee eligibility for or receipt of funding.

processes, and materials needed to pursue an opportunity. It then moves to **PURSUE**, identifying opportunities that fit its mission and capabilities and developing proposals that demonstrate its experience and ability to deliver. These areas of work are distinct but mutually reinforcing: partnerships can contribute expertise, reach, evidence, and resources to a proposal, while funding can help effective partnerships expand their work and impact.

During **SUSTAIN**, the institution delivers results, measures impact, and carries relationships, infrastructure, evidence, and lessons forward. These gains inform the next **ALIGN** stage, allowing each effort to strengthen the next. Leadership and governance, relationship management, proposal and award support, and evidence and learning reinforce the full cycle. Institutions can begin where attention is most needed while keeping the connections among the stages in view. The best practices that follow are organized around each stage and offer practical approaches that institutions can adapt to their priorities and operating environments.

## STAGE 1 | ALIGN

### *Begin with institutional purpose*

1. **Start with a shared priority and a clear value proposition**

   The most promising partnerships began with alignment: the institution and the partner understood the need they were trying to address and could see how each party would contribute. For an HBCU, the starting point may be a community health concern, a workforce shortage, a research question, or a student-development goal. The institution can then connect that priority to existing assets - faculty expertise, academic programs, facilities, student talent, community trust, data, or access to populations and settings that a partner may not reach on its own.

   This changes the opening conversation. Instead of beginning with a request for funding or resources, the institution can present a credible opportunity to solve a shared problem. A concise value proposition should identify the population or system need, the proposed contribution of each party, and the result they could achieve together.



### Put the practice into action

- Select two or three health priorities that clearly reflect the institution's mission and strengths.
- Inventory the expertise, programs, facilities, relationships, and evidence the institution can contribute.
- Describe the partner's likely interest and the value it could gain from the relationship.
- Prepare a one-page partnership concept that states the shared need, proposed roles, and intended results.

## STAGE 2 | CONNECT

***Build relationships around shared purpose***

**2. Develop relationships before a proposal or sponsorship request**

Participants repeatedly described relationship-building as active work: reaching out, attending community meetings, using campus offices and leadership networks, and having candid conversations about fit. Early contact creates time to understand a prospective partner's goals, decision process, and constraints. It also gives both parties room to refine an idea before deadlines narrow the choices.

A durable relationship also needs more than one point of contact. An internal champion can help navigate the partner organization, while an institutional lead coordinates faculty, program offices, sponsored research, and leadership. Documented roles and regular communication make the relationship less dependent on any one individual.

### Put the practice into action

- Map existing relationships held by institutional leaders, faculty, alumni, advisory boards, and community partners.
- Identify both a relationship champion and a day-to-day manager on each side.
- Use discovery conversations to test alignment before defining the project.
- Maintain contact between opportunities through brief updates, shared learning, and review of emerging priorities.

### 3. Co-design the work around mutual benefit

The session highlighted partnerships that connect institutional goals with needs identified by employers, health systems, industry, foundations, and communities. Examples included health-career pipeline programs, clinical training, community education and screening, research experiences, workforce placements, academic program development, and investment in facilities, equipment, and personnel. What made these approaches useful was not the type of partner alone, but how the work generated shared value for students, communities, the institution, and the partner.

Co-design helps make that value explicit. Bringing partners into the planning process early allows them to shape curricula, training experiences, services, research questions, or workforce pathways. Community input helps confirm that the work responds to an actual need and can be delivered in a way that people will use and trust.

#### Put the practice into action

- Define what success should look like for students, faculty, community members, the institution, and the partner.
- Agree on roles, decision authority, staffing, data use, communications, and resource commitments before launch.
- Include the people who will deliver or receive the work in the design process.
- Choose measures that capture both activity and impact, such as learners trained, placements made, people served, research produced, or services expanded.

### 4. Use the full institutional and community network

Partnership and funding opportunities often become stronger when institutions look beyond a single department. Health expertise may reside in nursing, pharmacy, dentistry, public health, allied health, nutrition, social work, behavioral sciences, agriculture, data science, or other programs. Sponsored research offices, advancement teams, career services, economic development offices, alumni, and external advisory boards may also hold relationships or capabilities that a project needs.

The same principle applies outside the institution. Community colleges, four-year institutions, graduate programs, research-intensive universities, health systems, local

governments, and community organizations can contribute to different parts of a shared solution. These collaborations can extend student pathways, add specialized expertise or infrastructure, and create a more complete response to a workforce or community need.

### Put the practice into action

- Create a cross-campus map of health-related expertise, facilities, programs, and external relationships.
- Invite relevant academic and administrative units into opportunity discussions early.
- Use community and employer partners to validate needs and strengthen implementation plans.
- When appropriate, form multi-institution teams in which each organization has a defined and meaningful role.

## STAGE 3 | PREPARE

***Make readiness an ongoing institutional practice***

### 5. Prepare before a funding opportunity is released

Short application periods are easier to manage when core information, roles, and review processes are already in place. Readiness extends beyond grant writing to include leadership support, faculty time, proposal and budget development, partner coordination, institutional approvals, compliance, submission, and a realistic plan for managing an award.

Participants identified several ways to strengthen institutional readiness, including exploring flexible approaches to providing faculty with time and support for proposal development; engaging graduate assistants and other personnel where appropriate; offering substantive proposal-development assistance; and mentoring less-experienced applicants using examples of funded proposals. These practices make proposal development a shared institutional effort rather than placing most of the responsibility on individual faculty members alongside their teaching and other duties.



**Put the practice into action**

- Maintain reusable descriptions of the institution, its capabilities, programs, partnerships, and community reach, along with staff qualifications, required registrations, compliance documents, and standard budget information.
- Establish a proposal team with designated leads for program design, writing, budgeting, partner coordination, institutional approvals, submission, and award planning.
- Provide prospective applicants with mentoring, examples of successful applications, internal review, and dedicated preparation time where feasible.
- Track relevant opportunities and federal priorities through a shared calendar so teams can begin planning before opportunities are released.

## STAGE 4 | PURSUE

***Focus on strong-fit opportunities and evidence***

### 6. Select opportunities deliberately and lead with evidence

A focused portfolio can be more effective than pursuing every available opportunity. Early screening helps an institution determine whether a solicitation fits its mission, eligibility, expertise, available personnel, partner requirements, timeline, and ability to manage the award. If an institution is not eligible or prepared to apply as the lead organization, it may still be able to participate as a partner depending on the funding announcement's requirements.

Existing work can also become the strongest evidence in a proposal. State-funded initiatives, community programs, clinical training, mobile services, workforce partnerships, research centers, and other ongoing efforts can demonstrate reach, trust, delivery experience, and measurable results. A proposal becomes more credible when it shows not only what the institution intends to do, but what it has already learned and accomplished, along with evidence of stakeholder buy-in.

**Put the practice into action**

- Use a go/no-go review that addresses eligibility, strategic fit, evidence, staffing, partners, timeline, and post-award obligations.



- Prioritize opportunities for which the institution can explain why it is a necessary or especially well-positioned partner.
- Maintain an evidence bank with community needs, people served, learners trained, placements, outcomes, publications, partner commitments, and lessons learned.
- Ask an internal reviewer to test the proposal against every published requirement before submission.

## STAGE 5 | SUSTAIN

### *Carry Value Forward*

**7. Plan for sustainability from the beginning**

A partnership or award creates greater value when it leaves the institution better prepared for what follows. Participants described investments in clinics, laboratories, equipment, academic programs, staff positions, student experiences, and community relationships that could continue to support the institution after the initial project. This is the practical link between partnership development and funding readiness: relationships can bring expertise, access, and resources to a proposal, while funding can help a productive partnership expand its work and evidence.

Sustainability does not mean that every activity must continue unchanged. It means deciding early which contributors, assets, services, or relationships should remain; how they could be supported; and what evidence will guide the next decision. A brief review at the end of each effort can capture what worked, what changed, and what the institution is now ready to pursue.

**Put the practice into action**

- Identify the contributors, equipment, data, curricula, services, and relationships that should remain after the initial investment.
- Discuss continuation costs, ownership, maintenance, data stewardship, and future funding during project design.
- Track a return on impact alongside financial measures, including benefits to students, workforce partners, and communities.



- Document lessons and reusable products, then apply them to the next partnership or funding decision.

## FROM READINESS TO RESULTS

The listening session reinforced that HBCUs already bring a strong foundation to this work: mission-driven programs, talented students and faculty, community credibility, and relationships across the health sector. The roadmap connects these strengths in a practical sequence - from defining priorities and developing the right partnerships to preparing early, pursuing well-aligned funding, and sustaining successful efforts.

Because the stages reinforce one another, each partnership or award can leave behind stronger relationships, clearer evidence, useful resources, and lessons that improve the next opportunity.

A focused starting point is to:

- Identify two or three health priorities and map the strengths, evidence, and potential partners connected to each.
- Designate leads for partnership development and funding readiness, with a clear process for engaging leadership and relevant campus offices.
- Develop a reusable proposal library and maintain a 12-month calendar of anticipated opportunities.
- Document results from an existing initiative and review partnership prospects, funding priorities, proposal decisions, and follow-up actions each quarter.

Applied consistently and adapted to institutional circumstances, these practices can help HBCUs build partnerships around shared priorities, pursue funding with greater focus, and carry the value of each effort into the next.



## RESOURCES

These federal resources can help institutions monitor HBCU initiatives, find opportunities, confirm registration requirements, and learn about the grant process.

**Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs) | Office of Minority Health (OMH)**
Information on HHS initiatives, annual HBCU plans, events, funding opportunities, and other resources supporting HBCU engagement with OMH.

**HBCU Indefinite Delivery/Indefinite Quantity (IDIQ) Contracts | National Institutes of Health (NIH)**
Information on NIH's HBCU IDIQ contracting initiative, which awards contracts to small businesses and HBCU partners to support mission-critical services across NIH.

**Historically Black Colleges and Universities Center for Excellence in Behavioral Health (HBCU-CFE) | Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA)**
Information on SAMHSA's HBCU Center of Excellence in Behavioral Health, which supports HBCU students through behavioral health education, training, and career development opportunities to help strengthen the behavioral health workforce.

**HHS Grants | HHS.gov**
Information for prospective and current HHS grantees, including application and grants-management resources.

**Home | Grants.gov**
Search for federal funding opportunities, review eligibility and registration guidance, subscribe to notices, apply through Workspace, and access applicant training and support.

**Home | SAM.gov**
Explore federal funding and contracting opportunities.