

The 2nd Annual Community Engagement Ambassador Institute

Day 1 - Public Health & Leadership Development



Thursday, March 26, 2026

8:00–9:00 AM

Registration, Continental Networking Breakfast, & Vendor Expo

9:00–9:20 AM

Welcome and Connect to Purpose

Speakers:

Gwendolyn Devins, MPH, CCHW

Community Engagement Manager, Mecklenburg County Public Health

Kimberly Scott, DrPH, MPH, CHES

Interim Director, Mecklenburg County Public Health

9:20–10:20 AM

Keynote Address

Speaker: Apryl Alexander, PsyD

Metrolina Distinguished Professor of Health & Policy, Department of Health Management & Policy; Director, UNC Charlotte Violence Prevention Center, UNC Charlotte

10:20–10:40 AM

Break, Networking, Vendor Expo, & Travel to Breakouts

10:40–11:25 AM

Session 1: *The Power of Prevention: Your Role in the Public Health Ecosystem*

Breakout Sessions

(Choose ONE Session to Attend)

Option 1 Title: From Community Insight to Program Action: Strengthening Community Health Leadership Across Mecklenburg County

Speaker: Laveina Dash

Board Member, Agape Christian Counseling Center; Founder, LAD Research Enterprises

Option 2 Title: Voices in Action: Storytelling as a Tool for Wellness & Advocacy

Speaker: Lrlanda Ruiz, JD, MEd

CEO, HabilidadX

11:25–11:30 AM — Transition

Travel to next breakout

11:30 AM–12:15 PM

Session 2: *Hot Topics: What's Shaping the Health of Our Communities?*

(Choose ONE Session to Attend)

Option 1 Title: Food as Medicine: Navigating the New Community Care

Speaker: Courtney Bost, MBA_HA, CAPM

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Option 2 Title: Trusted Voices, Healthier Communities: The Power of Community in Public Health

Speaker: Kia Thacker, MPH

Owner & Principal Consultant, Legacy Bloom Consulting

12:15–1:15 PM — Networking Lunch & Vendor Expo

1:15–1:45 PM — Research Presentation & Conversation

Research Presenter: Balkirat Kaur, Northeastern University, MPH Student

Conversation: Irvin Sloan, CEO, Navigating Grey and Orlandus Gilmore, CEO, App YOUNiversity

1:45–2:30 PM

Session 3: *From Boots on the Ground to Voices at the Table*

Title: Veterans Awareness and Support

Speaker: Edison Platt, MA

Veterans Services Manager, CSS | Veterans Services, Mecklenburg County Government

2:30–2:45 PM — Break

Visit Exhibitors / Travel to Breakouts

2:45–3:30 PM

Session 4: *Policies, Power, and Public Voice*

(Choose ONE Session to Attend)

Option 1 Title: The “Infodemic”: Combatting a Public Health Crisis with Empathy and Clarity

Speaker: Michelle Patridge-Doerr, MS, MPH, CHES

Health Communications Manager, Mecklenburg County Public Health

Option 2 Title: Closing the Gap Between Science and Access: Trauma, Mental Health, and Community-Level Solutions for Health Equity

Speaker: Zakiya Smith, MPP, MBA

Project Manager, Veterans Systems Improvement, Mecklenburg County Community Support Services

3:30–3:35 PM — Transition

Travel back to main room

3:35–4:00 PM — Closing & Evaluation

4:00 PM — Adjourn