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Robert Wood Johnson Foundation, Evidence for Action Program Award Will Fund Arts-Based Research in Atlanta to Better Understand Vaccine Hesitancy

Two local organizations championing arts and health will lead the Equitable Vaccines Project to address vaccine hesitancy and healthcare access barriers in metro Atlanta

ATLANTA, GA – April 13, 2026 – Performance Hypothesis, in partnership with [Out of Hand Theater](#), has been awarded a grant through Evidence for Action's Rapid Response: Reinvesting in Racial and Indigenous Health Equity Research program, funded by the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation. This award will relaunch and expand the Equitable Vaccines initiative—a scalable, community-driven model that has already demonstrated success in increasing vaccine confidence and shifting attitudes in high-risk communities.

New Arts-Based Community Research and Engagement Strategy

This funding will allow the project to continue and expand this work in the Greater Atlanta area, where both Black and Hispanic communities face persistent disparities in healthcare access and outcomes. The award will support a research-forward approach with three key objectives, to understand: 1) why misinformation spreads and why distrust in public health exists—particularly around vaccines—in Black and Hispanic communities in Metro Atlanta; 2) how well arts-based community events work to build trust and counter misinformation; and 3) whether arts-infused events help more people access health services.

Using a culturally responsive, arts-based model, the program will engage community members in open dialogue and deliver accurate health information in trusted community spaces led by local facilitators. The investment will fund 10 new community health events over a 12-month period—6 in Hispanic communities and 4 in Black communities.

A Track Record of Addressing Deep-Rooted Health Inequities

From 2021–2024, Performance Hypothesis and Out of Hand Theater partnered to deliver Equitable Vaccines programs across rural Georgia, engaging Black communities disproportionately impacted by COVID-19. The project was designed to advance racial health equity by addressing deep-rooted mistrust, misinformation, and access barriers in Black communities—particularly in rural Georgia, where vaccination rates have lagged due to a long history of medical racism, poor access to care, and inadequate public health communication.

“This grant allows us to continue work that was abruptly interrupted, but more importantly, it enables us to prove what we've always known—that meeting communities where they are, with respect and creativity, is the most effective path to building trust and advancing health equity,” said Marcel Foster, CEO of Performance Hypothesis. “At a time when misinformation is rampant and trust in public health

institutions is eroding, arts-based engagement offers a powerful alternative to traditional outreach. We're grateful to Evidence for Action, a national program of the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation for investing in this community-driven approach."

Adria Kitchens, Co-Executive Director at Out of Hand Theater, said, "Theater is a space for the voices of the community to be authentically expressed, where difficult conversations can happen and where stories are shared. By bringing arts-based strategies into the discussion of vaccines and health we are not just delivering information—we are creating experiences that honor people's lived realities and open doors to meaningful dialogue and healing."

Findings from the research will be published by the end of the grant period, contributing evidence-based insights to support more effective, culturally responsive public health interventions nationwide.

About the Partnership

Performance Hypothesis and Out of Hand Theater bring together expertise in community engagement, arts-based communication, and participatory research to create innovative solutions to complex public health challenges.

Out of Hand Theater has collaborated with dozens of community partners since 2001 to produce programs that combine art to open hearts, information to open minds, and conversation to inspire action. Their programs include Equitable Dinners, Shows in Homes, Community Collaborations, Creative Kids, and the Community Impact Lab.

Performance Hypothesis is an Atlanta-based arts and health agency. Since 2021, Performance Hypothesis has championed arts and health policy efforts and activated community events, forming partnerships with community organizations, universities, and global arts health organizations across the state along the way.

About Evidence for Action

Evidence for Action (E4A) is a national program of the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation housed within the University of California, San Francisco. The Rapid Response funding was created to support timely, solutions-oriented racial and Indigenous health equity research disrupted by federal funding shifts. This research was supported by the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation. The views expressed here do not necessarily reflect those of the Foundation.

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