

Practices for building Equity & Inclusion Into Community Engagement Processes

Given the complexities of our history in the US and the inequities that currently exist in our education system, creating truly equitable engagement processes is deep and important work. Although it takes time to become skillful at this work, there are steps we can take right away to make progress. Below we describe strategies to build relationships, organize for inclusion, and share power in order to implement equitable dialogue and deliberation processes.

I. Build RELATIONSHIPS first

With self

- Continue to develop your own understanding about equity and issues of social inequality and oppression (race, gender, sexual orientation, class, etc.) Examine the impact of these issues on education.
- Develop awareness of your own biases and understandings. Increase your understanding about what you don't know about how others experience the world.
- Be open to learning more.
- · Be willing to be uncomfortable at times.

With others

- Meet one to one with people prior to inviting them to join an engagement process. Get to know them a bit. Share a meal. Find out what matters to them.
- Create a safe space where it is ok to be uncomfortable.

With affinity groups

Given the nature of systemic and internalized oppression, it can be helpful to have people meet in
affinity groups (i.e. same ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation) prior to joining a mixed group
process. Affinity groups can provide a safe place to talk frankly about issues; prepare people to
participate in a mixed group with more confidence; and provide an opportunity for people to
receive support from others.

II. Organize for INCLUSION & EQUITABLE participation

Form a diverse organizing committee

- Form an organizing group that is diverse (consider race, culture, gender, sexual orientation, class, etc.); includes other kinds of diversity relevant to the issue being addressed; and include formal and informal school and community leaders.
- Establish decision-making and group norms that actively encourage giving voice to the groups that have been undervalued and disregarded in the past.
- Name power dynamics and privilege and intentionally create group processes that will address these dynamics.

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Frame issues in ways that are balanced and accessible to all

- Frame the issue with the help of a diverse group of people who bring a variety of experiences and perspectives to the table.
- Create accessible materials (use visuals; everyday language; no jargon).
- Offer culturally relevant translations.

Recruit and train diverse facilitator teams

- Identify facilitator teams that are reflective of community demographics (gender, sexual orientation, race, culture, age, etc.). Student/teacher facilitator teams can be especially effective.
- Prepare facilitators to create inclusive spaces for conversation (i.e. scan for equitable participation; model power sharing; create a space to hold uncomfortable conversations; foster a welcoming atmosphere).

Hold events in places that are appropriate for many different groups

- Choose locations that are familiar to people of color and groups that have not been represented in the past.
- Schedule events that don't interfere with days of celebration, religious observances and cultural festivals.

Provide support so everyone can participate

- Offer supports such as child-care, transportation, meals, and language translation.
- · In some cases, stipends or incentives can be helpful.
- · Make sure venues are accessible to all.

III. Share POWER

Share decision-making

- Choose a decision-making process (i.e. consensus, voting, etc.) that is agreed to by the group.
- Scan the group to ensure that everyone participates actively.
- Ensure that key decision-makers reflect the diversity of the group.

Establish clear links between the engagement process, decision-making and power

- Make sure you have a plan for how the process will lead to action.
- Secure commitments from decision-makers and formal leaders.

Ensure that people who represent differing viewpoints as well as the diversity of the community lead action efforts.