

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.

