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# Can We Talk About This?

## Exploring Equity Within Our Organizational Culture

Jhumpa Bhattacharya & Jimena Quiroga Hopkins



# GOALS

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- Explore the definitions of equity and organizational culture
- Surface and identify hidden blocks in our organizational culture that prevent us from having courageous dialogues
- Identify strategies to shift organizational culture

# AGENDA

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- Welcome/Introductions/Goals and Agenda
- Icebreaker
- Framing
- Definitions
- Our Equity Pulse Activity
- Talking About Equity Group Activity
- Debrief
- Closing

# ICE BREAKER

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- Talk about a time when you had to initiate a difficult conversation. What helped you have that conversation?
- Talk about a time when you had to convince someone or some people to try something new. How did you do it?
- Talk about a time when you changed a habit or a conviction. How did you do it?

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# EQUITY

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Equity means each person or group is treated fairly and has equal access to economic, social, and educational opportunity. For members of groups that have been excluded from resources, equity may involve providing greater resources to compensate for past exclusion and discrimination. In the after school and youth development arenas, providing equitable access means young people and their families can fully participate in programs without facing physical, financial, emotional, cultural or other barriers. Equity also involves offering programming which:

- Includes and reflects the communities served
- Seeks to reduce social and academic disparities between groups
- Challenges stereotypes and inequities
- Draws upon the input and decision-making of participants and their families and communities

# ORGANIZATIONAL CULTURE:

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The psychology, attitudes, experiences, beliefs and values (personal and cultural) of an organization. It is a pattern of shared basic assumptions that a group learns, and is passed on to new members as the correct way to function.

- The relationship between individuals and organizational culture is symbiotic in that the people end up affecting the culture as much as the culture affects them.
- Changing an organizational culture requires an investment in time and energy.
- While an organization's culture is always experienced or felt, it is not always articulated.

# OUR EQUITY PULSE

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- There are 8 charts on the walls which consist of some of the most common equity-related issues: race and racism, class, sexual orientation, privilege and power, gender and gender stereotypes, community resources and needs, youth empowerment and tensions between groups.
- On your tables there are dot stickers. Pick 8 dots.
- Walk to each chart and place your dot in the appropriate box.

# TALKING ABOUT EQUITY

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- Pick an equity issue that you would like to discuss further and go to that table.
- At your table groups, discuss the questions provided on the table tents.
- Create a chart with blocks and supports to having a conversation in your organization about the issue.

# THANK YOU!

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# Taking Note: Can We Talk About This?

**P**art of assessing your program's efforts on equity and diversity is looking at how the adults involved talk and relate to each other around these issues. This tool will help you get a quick feel for how the adults in your organization discuss (or avoid discussing) various dimensions of equity and diversity. It will also provide some suggestions for enhancing the staff's capacity to engage topics which may be unfamiliar or otherwise challenging.

While it is not always easy to discuss such topics, open dialogue is necessary for creating a shared understanding of your program's values and goals, and for developing meaningful and concrete ways to hold everyone accountable for effectively serving participants and families of all backgrounds and experiences. In addition, until we as adults can talk across differences about matters like power and privilege, stereotypes and disparities, young people will not have the role models they need to fully develop their own skills for understanding, respecting, and learning from others.

This tool is designed to complement the Program Assessment for Equity and Diversity process. Individuals should complete the checklists first and then share answers with the entire staff.

The checklists in Parts A and B below will help you gauge what is – and what isn’t happening in staff and organizational dialogue around issues related to equity and diversity. They are centered on two basic questions:

- Do particular issues get raised for discussion among adults in the program?
- If so, what happens when they get raised? Are they acknowledged? Discussed? Ignored? Incorporated into your program’s goals?

For each set of issues in the left column, ask yourself first: Do these issues get raised? California Tomorrow’s experience suggests that in some programs, issues like race and racism, sexual orientation, bias, inclusion and exclusion, and so on don’t get talked about at all. In other cases, the issues may get raised, but only by one or a few people for whom they are a concern, while others stay out of the conversation. Finally, in some programs, issues are brought up by many different people, and generate substantial interest and attention within the program. Check the applicable box or boxes under the “do the issues get raised” heading to indicate where your program falls. You will notice there is also a space to add relevant additional issues from both your work and the larger community that may or may not be discussed in your program.

For issues which do get raised in your program, after completing the first set of responses, check the appropriate box or boxes under the “if they do get raised” heading to indicate what happens when the issues get brought up.

Answering these questions will give you a sense of where the strengths and comfort of your staff lie in discussing various dimensions of equity and diversity. These strengths can provide a basis for further dialogue or implementation of new goals and strategies. Answering the questions may also alert you to issues that people may be less aware of or that they are reluctant to discuss.

Part C offers ways to enhance your organization’s ability to address the topics that are less visible or more challenging.

## Part A: Talking About Diversity

| ISSUES                                            | DO THE ISSUES GET RAISED AMONG ADULTS<br>IN YOUR PROGRAM? |                                                           |                                                                 | IF THEY DO GET RAISED, WHAT HAPPENS?               |                                           |                                              |
|---------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------|
|                                                   | not talked about in<br>the program                        | raised by a few staff<br>only not a concern<br>for others | raised by multiple<br>staff and spark sig-<br>nificant interest | met with silence,<br>disinterest, or<br>resistance | good discussions<br>but no action follows | good discussion<br>and it leads to<br>action |
| cultural experiences<br>and differences           |                                                           |                                                           |                                                                 |                                                    |                                           |                                              |
| race and racism                                   |                                                           |                                                           |                                                                 |                                                    |                                           |                                              |
| class /<br>economic diversity                     |                                                           |                                                           |                                                                 |                                                    |                                           |                                              |
| language diversity<br>and bilingualism            |                                                           |                                                           |                                                                 |                                                    |                                           |                                              |
| sexual orientation<br>and family structure        |                                                           |                                                           |                                                                 |                                                    |                                           |                                              |
| gender and gender<br>stereotypes                  |                                                           |                                                           |                                                                 |                                                    |                                           |                                              |
| physical, mental,<br>and learning dis-<br>ability |                                                           |                                                           |                                                                 |                                                    |                                           |                                              |
| other (specify)                                   |                                                           |                                                           |                                                                 |                                                    |                                           |                                              |

## Part B: Talking About Equity

| ISSUES                                                                           | DO THE ISSUES GET RAISED AMONG ADULTS<br>IN YOUR PROGRAM? |                                                          |                                                            | IF THEY DO GET RAISED, WHAT HAPPENS?               |                                           |                                              |
|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------|
|                                                                                  | not talked about in<br>the program                        | raised by a few staff<br>only – not a concern for others | raised by multiple<br>staff and spark significant interest | met with silence,<br>disinterest, or<br>resistance | good discussions<br>but no action follows | good discussion<br>and it leads to<br>action |
| community<br>resources and<br>needs                                              |                                                           |                                                          |                                                            |                                                    |                                           |                                              |
| community<br>politics                                                            |                                                           |                                                          |                                                            |                                                    |                                           |                                              |
| barriers to access<br>and participation<br>(within program<br>and/or in society) |                                                           |                                                          |                                                            |                                                    |                                           |                                              |
| tensions between<br>diverse groups                                               |                                                           |                                                          |                                                            |                                                    |                                           |                                              |
| disparities and gaps<br>between diverse<br>groups                                |                                                           |                                                          |                                                            |                                                    |                                           |                                              |
| privilege<br>and power                                                           |                                                           |                                                          |                                                            |                                                    |                                           |                                              |
| stereotypes, bias,<br>and<br>discrimination                                      |                                                           |                                                          |                                                            |                                                    |                                           |                                              |
| youth<br>empowerment                                                             |                                                           |                                                          |                                                            |                                                    |                                           |                                              |
| social action and<br>social justice                                              |                                                           |                                                          |                                                            |                                                    |                                           |                                              |
| other (specify)                                                                  |                                                           |                                                          |                                                            |                                                    |                                           |                                              |

## Part C: Enhancing Your Dialogue

After individuals have completed the checklists, a facilitator should bring together staff members to discuss ways of enhancing organizational dialogue on issues related to equity and diversity. While remaining sensitive to staff members' concerns, the facilitator should emphasize the importance of staff honesty and clarity when speaking about the issues on the checklists:

- 🗨️ Overall, what issues related to equity and diversity do you feel the adults in your program and organization can talk about best?

- 🗨️ Which topics are hardest to raise or discuss?

- 🗨️ For areas that are hard to talk about or take action on, what is in the way? (check all factors that apply)

- ☐ People are afraid of talking about the issues.
- ☐ People don't really understand the issues or see anything that needs attention.
- ☐ There isn't a shared sense of importance or urgency about dealing with the issues or addressing needs and problems related to them.
- ☐ We don't agree on what should be done.
- ☐ People don't believe an after school or youth program can make a difference or have a role in addressing these types of challenges.
- ☐ People don't believe change can happen on these issues within the program or organization.
- ☐ Other (specify)

## What You Can Do

California Tomorrow's work starts from a few key premises: that issues of equity and diversity are important; that they can be safely and respectfully discussed among adults in your organization; that they can be effectively addressed in programs and organizations; and that after school and youth programs that address them can have a significant impact on youth and communities. That said, there is often groundwork that must be done to set the foundation for successful equity and diversity work at the program level. The following chart suggests some ways you can begin to overcome barriers to talking about challenging issues. You may wish to incorporate some of the more in-depth suggestions into your planning process using the Creating Your Action Plan Tool.

| if the challenge is .....                                                  | it may help to .....                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                |
|----------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| People are afraid or remain silent about issues of diversity or equity.    | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Create safe spaces for conversation through group/team building (useful tools from this Tool Kit: Starting the Process: Pathways to Opening Dialogue; Who Are We in This Work?).</li> <li>• Have facilitated dialogues.</li> <li>• Begin conversations in smaller groups, and/or in "affinity groups" (groups in which individual members relate to each other through some common bond, e.g. gender, ethnicity, job duties, etc.).</li> <li>• Have leadership put issues on table.</li> </ul>             |
| People don't think there are challenges or problems.                       | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Share information and research about the topic, including:               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- expertise of knowledgeable staff members;</li> <li>- information gathered from youth and families in the program and community;</li> <li>- outside speakers/videos; and</li> <li>- articles and books.</li> </ul> </li> <li>• Use tools from this Tool Kit, such as Listen to the Youth, or the Program Assessment Tool.</li> <li>• Seek out relevant professional trainings.</li> </ul> |
| There's no shared sense of importance or urgency in addressing the issues. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Share information and research about the topic (as above).</li> <li>• Use tools from this Tool Kit, such as Listen to the Youth, the Program Assessment Tool, or the New Eyes on Your Program.</li> <li>• Participate collectively in relevant trainings and discuss material.</li> <li>• Provide space for those who do feel a sense of urgency to share their perspectives with the rest of staff.</li> <li>• Share personal reflections and experiences of what makes this important.</li> </ul>        |

| if the challenge is .....                                     | it may help to .....                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                    |
|---------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| People don't agree on what to do.                             | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• First come to agreement on values and general goals, as well as on the nature of the problems and challenges you seek to address – grounding all this in what you know about the young people in your program and what you want to do for them.</li> <li>• Research what works.</li> <li>• Assess current situation using tools from this tool kit or other tools of your choice.</li> <li>• Bring in outside facilitator to help brainstorm and choose strategies.</li> </ul> |
| People don't think programs can make a difference.            | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Look together at model programs, research on effective practices, etc.</li> </ul>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                              |
| People don't believe the program or organization will change. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Uncover and address potential barriers to change (perhaps using the Organizational Culture section of the Program Assessment Tool).</li> <li>• Assess organizational leadership with an eye toward leading equity and diversity work; build capacity of leaders if necessary and/or open leadership on these issues to those with most significant expertise.</li> <li>• Develop and work toward a few achievable short-term goals to build momentum.</li> </ul>               |