



Diversity, Inclusion, & Equity in Community Foundations

Activity and Reflection on Meaning and Intents of Diversity, Inclusion, and Equity Language

It is often hard to find the language to communicate about issues of equity and diversity. Some of the language has been highly politicized, and much of the language is rooted in particular historical and political legacies. In order for productive dialogue to occur within an institution (or within our network) about these issues, it is important to move towards increasing clarity about what our words mean. The choice of words and how language about inclusion and equity is used in various contexts is also a matter of strategy – and careful consideration of those choices is part of a change process.

This activity is designed to assist community foundation leaders to begin examining the use of language within their foundations as a matter of intent and strategy and to provide an opportunity to better understand organizational dynamics generally related to inclusion and equity.

The activity is also a means of developing deeper understanding among the leaders of your LBE change effort.



Overview of Exercise:

In this activity your leaders will work together to:

- ◆ Brainstorm and reflect on the words that are used to talk about diversity, equity, and inclusion in the community foundation sector;
- ◆ Consider and discuss the reasons for, and the implications of, the language currently used in your community foundation;
- ◆ Give your team an opportunity to consider how the choice of language will have an important affect on the outcomes of your organizational efforts.

The Power of Culture

**“No person is your friend who demands your silence,
or denies your right to grow.”**

Alice Walker

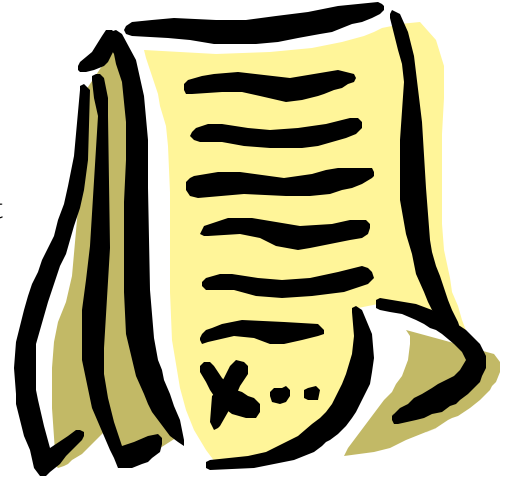
Group Brainstorm & Reflection

Step One:

Take time to Brainstorm and chart list of all of the words that are used to talk about and refer to issues of diversity, equity and inclusion in your various community settings. Then, everyone should sit back and reflect on the list silently.

Use the reflection sheet provide to you to jot down notes about those words. Which words make you uncomfortable when someone uses them? Why? What are the connotations or associations you have with that use of language? Which words are the ones you usually use? Why? What are the other feelings and issues that come up for you? Excitement? Fear? Laughter? Etc. Why do the words illicit these feelings and/or concerns?

After you have collected your thoughts, share them with a partner.



Step Two:

Next, consider and discuss the meaning of the following list of words and phrases taken from the mission statements of various community foundations around the country:



- ◆ **“improving the human condition”**
- ◆ **“enhancing the quality of life for all in the community.”**
- ◆ **“addressing ever-changing community needs in a diverse city.”**
- ◆ **“solve community problems”**
- ◆ **“fostering collaboration and understanding among members of the community”**
- ◆ **“promote cultural competency, sensitivity to diversity”**
- ◆ **“bring underrepresented voices into the discussion”**
- ◆ **“build on principles of asset building and inclusiveness”**

When you see/hear these statements, do they indicate or imply to you a focus on inclusion, diversity and equity? What might the choice of language imply? Does it seem to you that these foundations are speaking of the same thing? To you, does the different language express differing understandings and analysis re: equity and diversity and inclusion? Does the differing language imply different intents and objectives? Does the language used in the foundations match the language and intents used in community efforts related to diversity and equity? In what ways do the differences in language present challenges and in what ways are the differences opportunities.

Mixed Team Discussions

Move into mixed groups (pre-assigned). In these groups, you will be given an opportunity to consider and discuss the use of language within your own foundation.

For example, consider the words used in your foundation's program guidelines, mission statements and other literature about grantmaking and community investments that pertain to inclusion, equity and diversity. Think also about the words that are generally used in informal dialogues within the foundation. Are these words always the same?

Reflect on some of the words you *personally* find it's important to use in dialogues in the foundation in order to communicate inclusion and equity related issues with the staff? With donors? With the board? If there are differences in the language you end up using with these different groups, note these.

Then consider, from where you personally are positioned in the foundation, what are some of the words you find you have to avoid using in order to be able to discuss equity related issues within your foundation? (words or language that would turn people off or alienate them or be risky in some way). Why do you think that is true?

- (1) Each person will have about five minutes to think about these issues and do a "quick write" on some of these questions.
- (2) Then, the team should share their thoughts and discuss the dynamics of language in their foundation.
- (3) As a group, the team will also prepare a T chart that includes: Words Generally Used in Our Foundations and Words You Wouldn't Use in our Foundations. Where there are significant differences, note those on the chart. The charts will be posted on the wall.

Gallery Walk & Discussion

The whole group will take a few minutes to look over the T charts generated by the mixed-groups. Think about the similarities and differences across the groups.

Discussion Topics:

What might this mean for our foundation dialogue? Do we understand what each other means by the use of those words? What clarifications are needed? Are there agreements or norms we want to develop about the use of language in our organizational change work? How can we each be more conscious about our reactions to language used in these discussions as we deepen our dialogue and sharpen clarity about what each of us mean when we use different equity related terms?

The Power of Culture

"It is no longer good enough to cry peace, we must act peace, live peace, and live in peace..."

Shenandoah Proverb



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