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 many of our systems, creating truly equitable engagement processes is a tall order. However, it is possible for us to continue to practice and improve our ability to do this. 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.) and the impact of these identities on how you interpret the world.
- 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

- Give 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

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 includes formal and informal leaders in the community.
- Establish decision-making and group norms that actively encourage giving voice to the groups that have been marginalized in the past.
- Name power dynamics and privilege and intentionally create group processes that will address the issues.

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.
- Write at an accessible reading level for people with all educational backgrounds.

Recruit and train diverse facilitator teams

- Identify facilitator teams that are reflective of community demographics (gender, sexual orientation, race, culture, age, etc.). You may want to consider co-facilitators that represent different populations in the community – such as youth and adults, white people and people of color, a known liberal and known conservative, etc.
- 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 the right place at the right time

- Choose locations that are familiar to people of color, low income people, and other marginalized populations.
- 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 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 is an active participant.
- 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 results of 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.