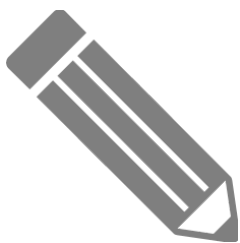




Equity Inquiry for Education Networks - Understanding Your Community



This worksheet is designed to support education networks in developing a deeper, shared understanding of their community. Use it as a starting point for listening and for building equitable relationships. Use it to illuminate the different community knowledge and lived experiences of those engaging in the equity inquiry. This compiled snapshot will be incomplete and imperfect, but it will provide an important baseline for reference as you move through the other modules in the framework. In order to examine equity in your network, programs, and activities, you must work to know the community you seek to engage, represent, and serve. We frame three areas of inquiry to begin: **Examining Demographics, Identifying Equity Gaps, and Surfacing and Affirming Assets.**

Directions:

- Each section builds on the other and begins with a **Purpose** and **Introduction** to frame the activity.
- The **Areas of Inquiry** column lists key questions and topics for consideration. Engage with them as relevant. You may want to record your findings and responses elsewhere. The group might tackle this individually or in pairs, or it may collaborate as a larger group.
- Use the accompanying **Recommendations and Resources** to gather data, inform your responses, and guide your approach. These resources will also support you in the larger, necessary work to know your community authentically.
- Finally, **Reflect** on your learnings and your own lived experience in the community. Prioritize time to process and share your reflections as a group. You may wish to engage in the reflection questions after each of the three sections, or you may consider them at the end.

1. Examining Demographics

Purpose: Examine demographic and other data as a baseline for learning more about your community.

Introduction: Demographic data can provide an important overview of the communities and schools in an education network. It can shed light on community makeup and highlight key indicators of inequity. Examining demographics across a community can also reveal where different groups are located and what access they have to services, transportation, and opportunity. **But also keep in mind that communities are more than statistics or monolithic groups.** Relying too heavily on this kind of analysis can perpetuate harmful assumptions, hide deeper truths, and eclipse important stories, as voiced by the community itself.

Areas of Inquiry	Recommendations and Resources
<p>Who is represented in your region or community? What groups, shared characteristics, and aggregate information do you find? Consider data on:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Total regional population ● Race and ethnicity ● Language spoken ● Age distribution ● Gender ● Sexual orientation ● Political affiliation ● Religious affiliation ● Disability status ● Household income (median) ● Household number, type, size (“head of household,” children, marital status) ● Housing structure types, age ● Housing status (own, rent, homeless) ● Employment status, rates ● Education level ● Families below poverty level ● Families qualifying for benefits (e.g. SNAP, TANF, WIC) ● Houses with broadband <hr style="border-top: 1px dashed #ccc;"/> <p>What data pertains specifically to students and families in the schools you serve? Consider identifying many of the categories above specific to schools and districts. Look at education-specific or school and district data like:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Disciplinary actions ● English Learners, students with “limited English proficiency” ● Students qualifying for free and reduced-price meals ● Students with IEPs, disabilities ● Student race and ethnicity ● Student clubs, athletics, etc. ● Class size, student-teacher ratio ● Graduation rates ● Enrollment and/or completion of post-secondary degree programs ● Post-high school employment ● Per pupil spending ● Teacher race, pay, retention ● Parent associations ● Test scores and school ratings ● School type 	<p>1. Use publicly or readily available data. Surveying community members or asking schools or community organizations for this information places an undue burden on them. It can also perpetuate inequitable power dynamics in which marginalized communities are “subjects” for study by researchers.</p> <p>Resources for sourcing demographic and other community and school data:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● American Community Survey and Census sources ● Compiled databases of statistical information (Berkeley) ● National Center for Education Statistics (district profiles) ● Civil Rights Data Collection (U.S. Dept. of Education) ● Statisticsatlas.com <p>Resources on equitable approaches to research:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Why Am I Always Being Researched? (Chicago Beyond) ● More Than Numbers: A Guide Toward Diversity, Equity and Inclusion in Data Collection (Schusterman Foundation) ● Principles for Advancing Equitable Data Practice (Urban Institute) <p>2. Prepare for next steps. There is a story behind and beyond these statistics. They don’t define community. Acknowledge where your experiences and biases influence your understanding. Notice assumptions you’re making. Consider gaps in your understanding and what questions this data scan prompts. Whose voices are missing?</p>

2. Identifying Equity Gaps and Barriers

Purpose: Reflect on inequities in the community and begin identifying barriers and gaps that marginalized groups face.

Introduction: The findings above provide indicators of inequity. They can help reveal areas for an education network to focus its work to better understand and address them. Seek to learn about community need through needs assessments, listening tours, and authentic relationship building. **Your goal here is to identify inequities, but don't make assumptions about their causes.** Those without proximity to or lived experience in marginalized communities must be especially careful not to approach this exercise as voyeurs, tourists, or arm-chair analysts. Marginalized communities are not defined by needs and deficits. The next section invites you to identify and affirm the amazing leadership, organizations, places, and efforts that undergird these communities.

Areas of Inquiry	Recommendations and Resources
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● What patterns did you notice above? ● Which groups are disproportionately represented in key areas? For schools, look at things like discipline. ● For schools that serve students and communities facing barriers, what do you know about the educators (race, experience, etc.)? ● Where are schools and communities located geographically? What features contribute to marginalization? Where are services? ● How equitably are resources allocated across the community? ● What barriers do marginalized communities and face? Consider safety, food insecurity, housing insecurity, and things like: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li style="width: 50%;">● Access to transportation <li style="width: 50%;">● Access to healthcare <li style="width: 50%;">● Access to healthy food <li style="width: 50%;">● Educational attainment <li style="width: 50%;">● Rates of unemployment <li style="width: 50%;">● Access to excellent schools and learning opportunities <li style="width: 50%;">● Addiction support <li style="width: 50%;">● Affordable housing <li style="width: 50%;">● Affordable housing <p>How do these barriers impact educational equity?</p>	<p>1. Get more information. The data you gathered above can help identify trends for further inquiry, but it doesn't paint a full picture. Engage with marginalized groups who can share their experience. But do not burden them or expect them to educate you. Ensure benefit for the storytellers. Draw on authentic relationships of those from marginalized communities on your inquiry team. Prioritize cultural competence. Find information already compiled, including analyses of structures and patterns of inequity in your community. Do a collaborative root cause analysis.</p> <p>Resources and approaches:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Leverage a community needs assessment ● Conduct listening tours and empathy interviews ● Use storytelling as data collection ● Use root cause analysis tools like a "fishbone diagram" <p>2. Don't make assumptions. Check your biases. Avoid assumptions about causes or the experience or mindset of others. Identify inequities as barriers and systems that people face, not people themselves. Strive to identify your biases and blind spots. Seek input from those who don't share your identity of experience.</p> <p>Resources:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● 6 Steps to Equitable Data Analysis (Edutopia) ● Analysis and Evaluation (RacialEquityTools.org)

3. Surfacing and Affirming Assets

Purpose: Identify leaders, organizations, places, and efforts in marginalized communities working to help students and families thrive. Affirm the assets of these communities as richly valuable.

Introduction: Communities are not just defined by deficits. Marginalized communities have rich assets that are too often under-resourced, under-valued, under-credited, under-supported, under-recognized, and under-valued by those who are not proximate to them. Education networks should seek to partner with people and organizations doing work on the ground across their community. They should seek to amplify and celebrate and support those powerful community efforts and spaces. The “who you know” approach to network-building tends to create homogeneous groups that fail to recognize and engage critical partners.

Areas of Inquiry	Recommendations and Resources
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● What aspects of a student’s and community’s experience influence their education? What kinds of assets will you focus on? Health, educational, recreational, cultural, etc.? ● You may choose to focus your asset-mapping on projects, people, and partners who directly support teaching and learning opportunities. But beware that those efforts might not have a formal affiliation with “education.” ● You’ll also want to consider how a range of institutions and assets in a community can impact or influence their well-being and engagement with education. ● What conditions, behaviors, knowledge, skills, people, places, organizations, projects, groups, or entities are assets in the communities you serve? ● Where do students, families, and members of the community go for help, guidance, resources, or support? Learning? Information? ● What people, organizations, and initiatives do they rely on? Trust? Look to for leadership? What are sources of strength? ● Whom do they engage with most often? Where do they gather, celebrate, organize, congregate? ● What affirms and amplifies the community’s culture and strengths? 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Asset-mapping must be participatory and community-informed. Avoid assumptions. Engage a range of stakeholders to surface assets. Avoid burdening marginalized communities, but rely on authentic relationships, your inquiry team, and previously compiled sources of information. When you engage marginalized communities, the process must have value for them. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ These questions apply to every prompt in the left column: <i>“What does the community consider its assets? How do you know?”</i> 2. Consider a range of assets. Prioritize those not traditionally known, engaged, or supported by your network. What have you failed to recognize? Consider places (and their leaders) such as: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Barbershops, beauty salons ● Churches ● Laundromats ● Community centers ● Associations ● Social groups and clubs ● Recreation centers and programs, parks ● Community non profits ● Social service agencies ● Health centers, clinics, hospitals ● Colleges and universities ● Libraries, museums, cultural institutions ● After-school organizations <p>Resources:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Participatory Asset Mapping Toolkit (Community Research Lab) ● Digital Promise’s guide for starting a community asset map ● Use: focus groups, surveys, community walks, interviews, directories

Reflect

In what ways is this analysis incomplete? What questions does it raise? What information is missing? What stories aren't told? What voices aren't heard? What do you need to learn more about?

How would you place yourself in this landscape? What characteristics and groups do you identify with—and why or why not? How would you describe your own lived experience in the community? How did this reflection make you feel?

How do your biases, identity, and experience in the community inform your perspective on the network? In what ways might it be similar or different from that of others participating in the network equity inquiry?

How does your network currently address inequities? Whom does your network partner and engage with? What's missing?