

Staff Focus Group Protocol

(Prior to participating in a focus group, staff members should be provided with the list of key terms on page 44 in order to be able to ground the focus group discussion in these shared meanings relevant to health inequities.)

Introduction and Overview

Thanks for coming today to talk with us about various aspects of the [LHD] related to health inequities. We really appreciate your willingness to give your time. My name is _____. This is _____. We are with [organization], a company that does strategic planning, research and evaluation for nonprofit and public sector organizations. I'm first going to go over a few details before we start. If you have any questions, feel free to ask them as they come up.

As you know, [LHD] is undergoing an assessment process to determine its ability to successfully reduce health inequities in our community. Our main purpose today in this group is to learn from you about the elements of the organizational culture and structure that you find support or interfere with the agency's ability to address health inequities. We are also interested in exploring the personal characteristics you think people at [LHD] need in order to enable the organization to address the environmental, social, and economic conditions that impact health.

- Role of facilitator and note taker. I will be leading the conversation today and my colleague [name] will be taking notes during the conversation. We'll get into a few guidelines for how you can help us to do our jobs in just a moment.
- Confidentiality. Everything you tell us today will be kept strictly confidential. Your answers will not be linked to your names when we provide information to the leadership here at [LHD]. In our report of these focus groups, some quotes will be used, but we will never link those quotes to individuals.

Ground Rules for the Group

I'd like to outline a few ground rules for the conversation:

- There are no right or wrong answers. We want to hear what each of you think and feel about your experience doing the work of the [LHD].
- Please speak one at a time—this will help the note taker capture everyone's thoughts and opinions.
- If you agree with what someone says, speak up, rather than nodding your head or gesturing in some other way. This helps [name] capture agreement in her notes.
- We would like to record this session so that your thoughts can be accurately captured. If you have a concern about this, please say so now.

Please take a minute now to review your handout that gives definitions of health inequities and related terms.

Do you have any questions before we begin?

1. To start, can everyone go around and share with us your name and what you do here at [LHD]?
2. Today we're meeting to discuss [LHD]'s capacity to address health inequities. Why do you believe that health inequities should be an area of concern for your health department?

Transition Statement:

First, let's talk some about how [LHD] supports staff to be involved in addressing health inequities:

3. What has [LHD] done to help staff at various levels learn about and develop skills to address the environmental, social, and economic conditions that impact health?

Probes:

- a. Can you describe formal orientation, training, workshops or conferences you have received at [LHD] or externally at other agencies or associations that [LHD] has sent you to?
 - b. Discuss whether [LHD] has a regular discussion or work group addressing health inequities and what role you and other staff have played in it.
4. How well-equipped are you and other staff to address the environmental, social, and economic conditions that impact health?

Probes:

- a. What are some key skills and characteristics needed in staff and [LHD] to address the environmental, social, and economic conditions that impact health?

(If not mentioned) Some of the skills that have been identified are in relation to community organizing, developing strategic partnerships, developing and advocating for public policies to address the environmental, social, and economic conditions that impact health, compiling and sharing data, evaluation, assessment, etc.

(If not mentioned) Some of the characteristics identified as important for addressing health inequities are listening, humility, creativity, the ability to be a team player and understands power dynamics, etc.

- b. Can you share whether and how you've seen these skills in action? Maybe you have examples of how you have demonstrated these qualities, or you've seen them in co-workers.
 - c. Do you think most people really understand what the environmental, social, and economic conditions that impact health are? Give more detail.
 - d. What other training and help from [LHD] do you think is needed for staff to be more effective in addressing the environmental, social, and economic conditions that impact health?
 - e. What more could be done in your work to address the environmental, social, and economic conditions that impact health if you had the support of [LHD]?
 - f. How well did [LHD] training and discussions help you in the work you and other staff do to address the environmental, social, and economic conditions that impact health? How has your work been impacted as a result?
5. How do you feel about the work [LHD] and you do to address the environmental, social, and economic conditions that impact health?

Probes:

- a. How important do you feel this work is? What priority does it take over other work [LHD] does?
- b. How do you think other staff feel about the importance of this work?

6. When you or other staff have ideas about improving the [LHD]’s mission and work, what processes are in place to bring them to the attention of decision-makers?

Probes:

- a. Give an example of how, when and how often [LHD] includes staff input and feedback on planning activities.

7. How welcoming and supportive is [LHD] to new ideas and programs to address root causes of health inequities?

Probes:

- a. Give an example of LHD’s response to a new idea.
- b. Can you describe the attitude that [LHD] and the leadership have toward trying new things?
- c. How does [LHD], leadership and staff cope with projects that fail?
- d. How does LHD and leadership handle differences in opinion?
- e. How do the reactions and attitudes of leadership staff members impact staff performance?

Transition statement:

Let’s move to talking about some of the work that [LHD] is doing around health inequities:

8. Can you describe any [LHD] work toward addressing the environmental, social, and economic conditions that impact health that has been successful?

Probes:

- a. What challenges, barriers and strengths and resources led to success? How has the work addressing the environmental, social, and economic conditions that impact health been enriched by that experience?

9. Can you describe any [LHD] work toward addressing the environmental, social, and economic conditions that impact health that has failed?

Probes:

- a. What challenges, barriers and strengths and resources led to failure? How has the work addressing the environmental, social, and economic conditions that impact health been enriched by that experience?

Transition Statement:

Now let’s talk about how [LHD] culture is in relation to issues of diversity:

10. Can you describe the diversity in [LHD]? Be sure to include all levels of staff.

Probes:

- a. By diversity, we generally mean people of different genders, religious, national, cultural, ethnic and racial backgrounds. In [locale], what might be other groups that should be considered?
- b. Does [LHD] staff and decision makers reflect the diversity of the people in [locale],? Can you describe how this is so?
- c. Describe how [LHD]’s recruitment, hiring and promotion practices promote or discourage diversity.

11. Are there serious internal discussions of the impact of racism, classism, sexism and other “isms” on health inequities at [LHD]?

Probes:

- a. Describe the comfort level of staff with these discussions.
- b. If these types of discussions have not occurred, why is that?

Transition Statement:

Lastly, let's talk some about [LHD]'s work with the community:

12. Describe how [LHD] works with community residents, community organizations and groups in addressing the environmental, social, and economic conditions that impact health.

Probes:

- a. In what ways do you build on community strengths in your work with the community? *(For probes, keep in mind that asset-based approaches include considering the strengths of individuals, associations and institutions in the community, and adding resources and support where needed to bolster these strengths.)*
- b. What type of community organizations does [LHD] work with? What do they do?
- c. What role does the community play in addressing the environmental, social, and economic conditions that impact health?
- d. How valuable are these roles in the work to address the environmental, social, and economic conditions that impact health?
- e. In what other ways do you think that community residents, organizations and groups should be involved in this work?
- f. Has [LHD] provided resources and training to build the capacity of these partners to do this work? Please describe what has been done and whether it had a positive impact on community residents, organizations and groups' performance in addressing the environmental, social, and economic conditions that impact health.
- g. What is challenging about working with community residents, organizations and groups?

Transition Statement:

As we're wrapping up our discussion, let's hear any remaining ideas you may have about [LHD]'s work to address health inequities:

13. Given your knowledge of current and future program areas, do you have any suggestions for [LHD] to improve and expand its work toward addressing the environmental, social, and economic conditions that impact health?
14. What more can [LHD] do to improve its ability to address the environmental, social, and economic conditions that impact health?

Thank you so much for your time today.