

GUIDE FOR COMPOSING A

Campus Racial Equity Team



CENTER *for* URBAN
EDUCATION

USC Rossier
School of Education

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

The inquiry tools presented in this guide are the product of the staff who worked at the Center for Urban Education (CUE) from 1999 to 2018. The tools evolved over time, in response to what CUE staff learned from using the tools at campuses across the country, as well as from research on race, racism, and racial equity. Presented here is a collection of CUE's most impactful tools, organized and edited by Cheryl D. Ching, PhD., who served as a research assistant at CUE from 2012 to 2017 and as a post-doctoral scholar from 2017 to 2018.

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ADDITIONAL TOOLS

For additional inquiry tools, please contact us at cue.media.communications@gmail.com.

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GUIDE CONTENTS

In this guide we discuss the importance of teams for equity work, the role team members play, and how to establish an equity team for your campus.

WHY TEAMS?	Page 4
FUNCTIONAL ROLES IN AN EQUITY TEAM	Page 6
TEAM COMPETENCIES AND CHARACTERISTICS	Page 9
FORMING AN EQUITY TEAM	Page 11
• Worksheet: Brainstorming possible team members	
• Worksheet: Finalizing team members	
SETTING TEAM GROUND RULES	Page 14
END NOTES	Page 15
REFERENCES	Page 16

WHY TEAMS?

One of the Center for Urban Education's (CUE) fundamental principles is that learning and change are:

- **Socially constructed**, meaning that ideas and concepts are mutually defined within a group using existing cultural ideals or through shared experiences;
- **Facilitated through participatory action inquiry**, a systematic cycle of equity gap identification using data disaggregated by race and ethnicity, equity-minded inquiry, reflecting on practice, developing and implementing practice changes, and assessing changes (Figure 1).

Practitioners interested in developing their equity-minded competence¹ and making equity-minded changes to their practice² can undertake the participatory action inquiry cycle on their own. However, in order to create institution-wide change, CUE recommends forming equity teams that are tasked with learning about and proposing equity-minded changes on behalf of the campus.

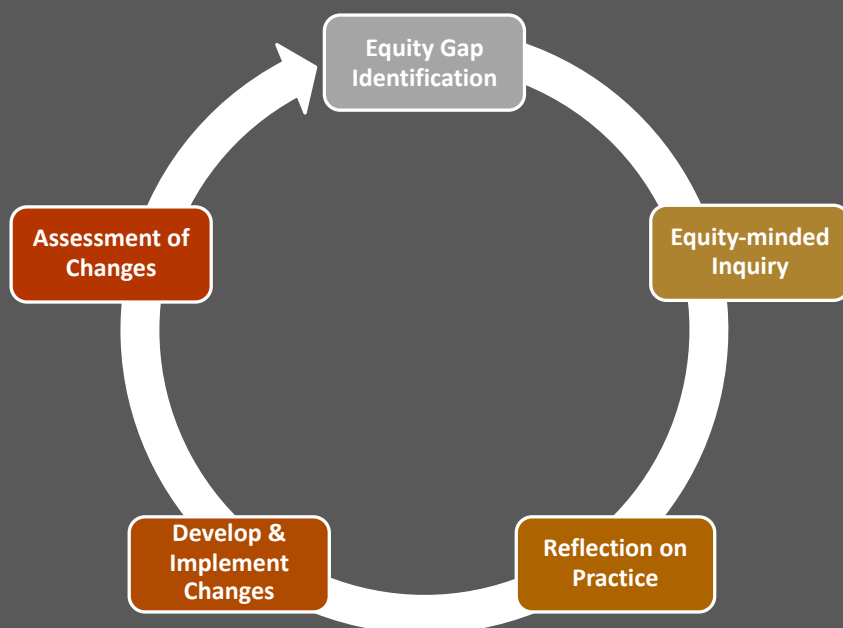


FIGURE 1.
CUE PARTICIPATORY
ACTION INQUIRY CYCLE

Teams bring together individual practitioners from across the infamous “silos” of higher education—faculty, administration, student services, and institutional research—all of whom bring perspectives and experiences that are crucial for making racial equity an institution-wide goal.

Furthermore, teams assemble practitioners who together have the knowledge and skills that are essential for bringing about equity-minded organizational change. This includes knowledge about academic governance, administrative structures, and organizational history and culture. Skill-wise, this involves leadership at the top, middle, and grass-roots levels, decision-making expertise, reflective capacity, and data savviness. With this array of knowledge and skills at hand, teams can structure a more multifaceted understanding of their institutional context and design more encompassing practice changes and interventions.

Finally, in gathering practitioners from different parts of a campus who are nested in various decision-making bodies, teams are well poised to disseminate inquiry findings and recommendations for practice recommendations.

CUE distinguishes between two categories for team member contributions: functional roles and key team competencies.

FUNCTIONAL ROLES IN AN EQUITY TEAM

Functional roles are needed to realize the practical aspects of equity work. These roles include team leader, institutional researcher, faculty and staff members, and boundary spanners.

TEAM LEADERS serve in a threefold capacity: team discussion facilitator, logistical coordinator, and equity work advocate. Campus teams can have one to three leaders who share or divide these responsibilities. If the team's inquiry is focused on a specific department/program/office, the team leader(s) should come from that department/program/office as they will have insight into particular needs, practices, and culture.

As discussion facilitators, team leaders:

- Help create a safe and friendly culture of inquiry;
- Support questioning of taken-for-granted knowledge and conventional wisdom;
- Encourage a collaborative learning experience in which no team member(s) dominate conversations;
- Guide dialogue in ways that emphasize the role and responsibility of practitioners and the institution in attaining racial equity that is action-orientated and steers away from focusing on perceived student deficits;
- Focus discussion on team learning and reflection rather than the technical aspects of a problem (e.g., statistical significance when analyzing student outcomes data);
- Assist in managing tense discussions and conflicts as they arise, refocusing attention on how and why the data lead to different interpretations;
- Provide team members with a chance for a last comment at the end of each meeting.

As logistical coordinators, team leaders:

- Define the agenda, keeping it focused on identifying problems rather than on developing immediate solutions;
- Prepare for team meetings and share materials with all team members beforehand;

- Meet regularly with institutional researchers to discuss updates on data requests and strategize on how best to facilitate inquiry- and data-driven conversations;
- Anticipate and address team challenges;
- Serve as task monitor to help remove obstacles facing the team, and facilitate the team's work;
- Ensure the team meets regularly to advance the equity work;
- Support and coordinate disseminating the team's findings and recommendations.

As equity advocates, team leaders:

- Keep senior campus leaders (e.g., president, chief academic and student services officers, deans) informed and engaged in equity work;
- Communicate and publicize the work;
- Connect the work to other campus initiatives.

INSTITUTIONAL RESEARCHERS collect, review, and share existing institutional data with team members, as well as prepare new data reports that address questions posed by the team during the inquiry process. In equity work, institutional researchers serve as teachers and equity advocates (Dowd, Malcom, Nakamoto, & Bensimon, 2012). Specifically, institutional researchers understand that the purpose of data in equity work is to establish a reasonable understanding of the equity problem on a campus (defined as outcome gaps by race and ethnicity), not ensuring the purity of methods. In addition, they understand that they are coaches who build the data capacity of team members.

To establish an understanding of a campus' equity problem, institutional researchers:

- Organize raw data into user-friendly formats;
- Walk the team through data reports, using plain, jargon-free language in their presentations and explanations;
- Suspend judgment if or when team members do not "get" the data;
- Create a learning environment in which team members can ask a range of questions about the data, even those that are seemingly "dumb."

As data coaches, institutional researchers:

- Do not assume that all team members will read and interpret a data table in the same way;
- Share the responsibility of describing the data and presenting findings so that team members can develop their own expertise as data teachers;
- Provide team members with strategies for how to present data and inquiry findings to other practitioners on campus.

Teams should include at least two **FACULTY AND STAFF MEMBERS** who are part of the department/program/office that is the focus of inquiry. These faculty and staff members can provide “insider” knowledge that is crucial to understanding the equity problem, identifying allies, and disseminating team findings and recommendations. Chosen faculty and staff members should also be well-respected by their peers and be voices practitioners outside the team listen to and take seriously.

Finally, all team members should ideally be **BOUNDARY SPANNERS** who serve on key campus-wide committees or initiatives currently taking place. As boundary spanners, team members serve as a bridge between the campus and the team; not only do they bring their knowledge from other roles, but they’re also in a position to share what they’ve learned on the equity team to the committees and initiatives they serve.

TEAM COMPETENCIES AND CHARACTERISTICS

Successful teams are composed of practitioners who contribute the following competencies and characteristics, adapted from Estela Bensimon's and Anna Neumann's (1993) study of college leadership:

CRITICAL THINKERS who are inquiry-oriented but stay focused on the task, are analytical, and expand the team's "intelligence" by redefining and reinterpreting the problem or issue.

COLLABORATIVE LEARNERS who are open to new ideas and constructive feedback, and who do not see participation as a burden.

ANALYSTS who are skilled at defining the problem, interpreting and seeing patterns in data, viewing data from diverse angles, and helping the team move from the simple to the complex.

INTERPRETERS who do not jump to conclusions, explain how an issue or topic could be viewed by those outside the team, and routinely ask, "How do we know that ... ?"

EMOTIONAL MONITORS who establish, maintain, and balance the human, personal, and emotional aspects of team dynamics, and who will facilitate others, introduce humanity, and ease tensions.

STUDENT ADVOCATES who ask, "What can the institution do better to serve racially minoritized students?" and who acknowledge that racial inequities in outcomes are created and/or exacerbated by inadequate knowledge, a lack of cultural know-how, and/or the absence of practitioner and institutional support.

FRIENDLY SKEPTICS who raise questions and critiques that will ultimately strengthen the team's findings.

EQUITY MONITORS who keep the team focused on racial equity and continuously raise questions about who is being impacted by race and ethnicity. Equity monitors are aware of their racial identity and recognize

that white is a racial identity; reflect on racialized consequences of taken-for-granted practices; and model how to view practices, structures, and policies through a critical racial lens.

FORMING A RACIAL EQUITY TEAM

To begin forming your campus racial equity team, first compile a list of practitioners who meet one or more of the following criteria:

- Boundary spanners;
- Committed to racial equity and keeping it at the forefront of campus dialogue;
- Deeply respected in their department/program/area;
- Noted by peers as influential;
- Bring diversity in knowledge, opinion, skill, and perspective on issues of race and racial equity.

Make sure to include a representative from your campus' institutional research office.

A worksheet to organize your list is provided on page 12 (“Brainstorming potential team members”).

Next, using the worksheet on page 13 (“Finalizing team members”), refine your initial list to 10 practitioners and note which of the competencies and characteristics described on pp. 9-10 each practitioner holds. In addition, consider the racial/ethnic and gender makeup of the practitioners on the list.

Finally, review the final list of practitioners and ensure the team is balanced in terms of race/ethnicity and gender. Select two to three practitioners who will be ideal team leaders based on the responsibilities described on pp. 6-7. Write “TL” beside the names.

WORKSHEET

PART 1: BRAINSTORMING POSSIBLE TEAM MEMBERS

Name of possible team member	Faculty (F) Staff (S)	Boundary Spanner	Committed	Respected	Influential	Diversity
1.		<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
2.		<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
3.		<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
4.		<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
5.		<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
6.		<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
7.		<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
8.		<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
9.		<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
10.		<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
11.		<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
12.		<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

WORKSHEET

PART 2: FINALIZING TEAM MEMBERS

Team member name	Critical Thinker	Collab. Learner	Analyst	Interpreter	Emotional Minder	Student Advocate	Friendly Skeptic	Equity Monitor
1.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
2.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
3.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
4.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
5.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
6.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
7.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
8.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
9.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
10.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

SETTING TEAM GROUND RULES

While team leaders are responsible for creating a safe and inclusive environment for learning and discussion, CUE encourages teams to co-construct ground rules for productive and equitable engagement—for example:

- Engage honestly;
- Speak for yourself;
- Refrain from personal attacks;
- No rank in the room;
- No dominating—step up and step back to give others an opportunity to engage;
- Do not avoid subjects when they become uncomfortable for you.

At the first team meeting, the team leaders can facilitate a brainstorming and discussion session about the ground rules, with the following prompts:

- “Everyone has had experiences in meetings. What have you found that works?”
- “Let’s review the list. Do you agree with these ground rules? Is anything missing?”

The list of ground rules should be present in subsequent meetings, as a reminder of what the team has co-constructed and agreed upon. Ground rules should be modified and added to as needed.

END NOTES

¹ For a discussion of equity-minded competence, see pp. 24-29 of CUE's *Laying the groundwork: Concepts and activities for racial equity work*.

² CUE has developed a series of equity-minded inquiry tools for syllabi review, disaggregated data analysis and goal setting, observations, document review, and website review.

REFERENCES

Bensimon, E. M., & Neumann, A. (1993). *Redesigning collegiate leadership: Teams and teamwork in higher education*. Johns Hopkins University Press.

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