



New Eyes on Your Program

As part of the process of assessing your equity and diversity efforts, it is often helpful to spend time observing your program environment—space, materials, people, and interactions—with an eye on the equity and diversity goals most important to you. This tool offers a set of questions to structure an equity- and diversity-based visual “tour” of your program. Such observation can surface concrete strengths and resources that you can build on to help reach your goals. It can also identify concrete needs and opportunities for further discussion, intervention, expansion, or change.

Some of the observations you generate using this tool can help in completing the Program Assessment Tool sections on environment/materials and outreach. In addition, issues and concerns for change that may arise can be incorporated into your work with the Creating Your Action Plan Tool.

Part A: Individual Observations

The questions on the attached worksheet will help guide your observation process. For maximum benefit, we suggest that staff members begin by using the questions to conduct individual observations, and then share and discuss these with the staff as a whole. Alternatively, the information from people's individual observations in Section I of the worksheet can be summarized and transferred to the sections on environment/materials and outreach in the Program Assessment on Equity and Diversity Tool and discussed as part of your assessment, rather than as a part of this particular tool. Here are some ideas for making either process successful:

- ☞ **Set the stage.** Before individuals begin their observations, it is useful to discuss the observation process, along with key questions and guidelines, in a staff-wide conversation. This conversation will allow the group to clarify observation goals, review suggestions for maintaining sensitivity and respect, and decide whether and in what ways staff members may wish to observe each others' activities.
- ☞ **Set aside time.** Your full set of observations need not be completed all at once, but for each question you consider, you should allow yourself enough time to thoroughly observe and reflect. Some observation (of both other staff and in your own work) can be done in conjunction with regular teaching, coaching, mentoring or other activities. This can help save time; however, in observing your own activities or interactions, you will want to be sure that you do not "stack the deck" in favor of seeing particular dynamics or outcomes that are not always present. You will want to observe at regular times, not merely during "equity and diversity" activities that may give you the outcomes you think you ought to be looking for.
- ☞ **Jot down your observations.** While much can be learned from just looking, we strongly encourage you to take written notes during your observations. This is for two reasons. First, finding the words to describe your perceptions helps you clarify what you are seeing and thinking. Second, your written notes will provide an important record for use in later collective dialogue, program assessment, and planning.
- ☞ **Stick with what you see.** During both the individual and collective portions of this work, we encourage you to maintain an open, honest, and non-judgmental attitude. Your primary goal should be neither to defend nor criticize, but simply to notice what is there. While allowing that complete objectivity may not be feasible, simply record these observations in the most unbiased way possible. Don't try to interpret anything as being "better" or "worse" than it is during the course of your observations. Just let what is there be there. There will be time to raise concerns or ideas for change in the staff discussion phase.

Part B: Staff Conversation

Once individuals have had a chance to observe on their own, a facilitator should schedule a staff conversation (or a few staff conversations) to discuss what people have seen. Conversation can be organized around one or more of the following questions:

- ☞ Whose experiences are visible in your program environment?
- ☞ Are anyone's experiences left out?
- ☞ What values related to supporting equity and diversity does the environment promote, if any? (e.g. cross-cultural respect, family involvement and connection, using multiple languages, and community service)
- ☞ Are any stereotypes being unintentionally reinforced? Are any being challenged?
- ☞ What strengths did you see in how the program is dealing with diversity and equity?
- ☞ Are there any things you saw that you would like to change or improve?

Part C: Using Your Observations In Further Assessment And Planning

The observations you gather can be helpful in completing parts of the Program Assessment on Equity and Diversity Tool – in particular, the sections on environment /materials, outreach, and in some cases, curriculum.

In addition, you may identify through observation and/or discussion some priority issues you would like to address or action steps you would like to take. These can be recorded on the Creating Your Action Plan worksheet.

Guidelines For Discussing Your Observations

Given the sensitive nature of the issues under consideration, discussing what you've seen can be tricky. The following guidelines offer strategies for discussing program observations in a safe and respectful way. We encourage groups to review these suggestions and/or to set up your own guidelines before beginning a conversation:

- **Describe, don't judge.** Remember that programs and program spaces are created by the people who work in them. In many cases, the materials and dynamics you have been observing were therefore developed, selected, and/or shaped by other staff members who are in the discussion room with you, or by people they know. Sticking to the facts without assuming anything about the intentions behind them can help signal that you respect the effort that went into what you have seen, even if you also wish to suggest that some things be enhanced or changed.
- **Mention positives as well as problems.** This builds good will and helps identify resources you can draw on.
- **Maintain confidentiality.** When describing what you have seen, do not use names of other staff, students, or parents. This can help minimize defensiveness and keep the focus of the discussion on materials, patterns, and dynamics instead of personalities.
- **Solicit and honor multiple perspectives.** Much of what we see reflects not just "what's there," but also who we are. To get the fullest program description possible, it is useful to have a variety of observers and to hold an open conversation that recognizes the value and limitations of each participant's perspective.

WORKSHEET: New Eyes on Your Program

Take a good look around your program with an eye toward diversity and equity in their many forms. Walk into the different hallways and rooms. Check out what's on the walls. Look over your books and other curriculum materials. Listen to any music that's playing. Listen to the languages you hear spoken. Look at the ways your various spaces are physically set up and at how young people use these spaces. Scan your outreach materials, brochures and application forms. Notice how people are interacting with each other. Use the questions below to reflect on what you see.

I. Program Environment

- What is on the walls? Which cultures and ethnicities are featured? What do you notice about the way gender is represented? What languages do you see? What types of families are portrayed? What messages stand out to you?
- What materials are on display, and what messages do these materials offer about diversity and equity?
- How accessible is the facility to people with physical limitations?

II. Program Dynamics

- How do participants group themselves? Who chooses to work with whom (or who do staff encourage to work together) during program activities? How do young people group themselves during breaks, on the playground, or in other settings?
- Who is engaged in what? Do you notice any patterns in which young people (or which groups of young people) are involved in particular activities? Are there activities which certain groups avoid?
- How do the participants relate to each other?
- How do the staff relate to each other?
- How do staff and participants relate to each other?

III. Other Observations

- What else do you notice that speaks to diversity and/or equity issues?