

Scenarios: Applying a health equity lens

HEALTH EQUITY LEARNING COMMUNITY

For the first scenario, read the scenario and pay attention to the action steps. Put a check mark or underline where a step was taken or a decision made. Then, with your team, talk through the reflection questions. Repeat for the second scenario.

Scenario 1: Parks and Recreation

The director of a local public health department bumped into a friend at church on Sunday. They started talking about their personal experiences at local parks and the community recreation center. The health director knows that rates of physical activity in her community are pretty low, and this conversation made her think that her department could help people get connected to these opportunities.

When she got back to work on Monday, after she approved the timesheets for all the staff, returned a call from the local paper about the flu season, created an agenda for the next staff meeting, responded to the most urgent emails, and prepared for a meeting with the human services director, she sent a quick email to a program supervisor about the conversation she had with her friend. Her colleague was very supportive. After a few back-and-forth messages, they decided to publicize the parks and recreation center hours and amenities to their clients.

The director asked the support staff to call the Parks and Recreation office to find out if they had some brochures. The office didn't have any current brochures (no budget for that), but they did have a flier they could send over and photocopy that had a picture of the recreation center and listed the hours, and they also had a poster to send over that could be displayed in the public health office.

The support staff found a good place to hang the poster and made photocopies of the flier. A few fliers were placed in the reception areas. The director asked the WIC coordinator to have all staff distribute the flier to their clients and let people know about the recreation center.

Reflection questions

- What assumptions were made about the situation? What assumptions were made about the solution?
- Whose perspectives and experiences were driving the decisions in this scenario? Whose voices were missing?
- What are some ways the health department could have sought out other perspectives?
- What questions could they have asked to understand the situation more fully?
- How could the story be different if we applied an equity lens from the beginning?

Scenario 2: Grant proposal

A staff person sees on Twitter that a local community foundation has a new request for proposals out. After a quick glance, it looks like her health department could apply: the grant guidance says that the foundation wants to support initiatives that improve quality of life for residents of their region. She tells her supervisor about it, and the supervisor forwards her email to the public health director. The director puts it on the agenda for the next management team meeting.

When the director and the three program leads get together, they brainstorm about the needs they are aware of and the ideas they have. The ideas included buying more cribs for moms involved in their Family Home Visiting program; doing a public education campaign to raise awareness about the importance of immunizations; purchasing brochures about breastfeeding; doing a public education campaign about mental health; and purchasing pens, magnets, and other promotional materials to promote the department's services and hours.

In the end, the director throws together a proposal to do a public education campaign about mental health, since it's one of the priorities in their community health improvement plan. The grant includes a requirement for both a target population and community collaboration, so she considers who her health department might work with on this. She makes a phone call and leaves a message for the director of the tribal health department in their jurisdiction. When she doesn't hear back after a couple of days, she calls the local principal that she's worked with before. The principal is enthusiastic and agrees to sign a letter of support.

After developing a draft proposal with bits and pieces of existing documents and previous proposals, the director sends a draft to her program leads for comment. After receiving the letter of support from the school, she hits the "submit" button on the foundation website a few days later, about five minutes before the deadline.

Reflection questions

- What blind spots might be operating in this scenario? What are some ways the health department could seek other perspectives?
- Who stands to benefit from this approach? Who is left out?
- What other questions could the director or the program leads ask that might help bring equity into the discussion?
- What might be some other strategies to develop the grant proposal differently? How could the story be different if the health department applied an equity lens at the beginning?

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