

A Blueprint for Workplace Health Equity Circles

A core element of public health organizations is to advocate for and work towards achieving an ethical, equitable, and socially just public health ecosystem. Agencies working to advance health equity are trying to “walk the talk” by leading internal organizational change efforts that support racial healing, justice, and transformation to address institutional inequities. Creating healthier communities means paying close attention to organizational culture, including facilitating strategies to ensure psychological safety. Without proper self-evaluation, it is much more difficult to truly understand and serve communities, as well as assess how practices may perpetuate harm internally or fail to address systemic issues. ASTHO’s Health Equity and Diversity Initiatives (HEDI) team supports our members by developing equity-centered capacity building tools to foster internal transformation. ASTHO’s Health Equity and Diversity Initiatives (HEDI) team supports our members and staff by developing equity-centered capacity building tools to foster internal transformation.

The HEDI team convenes Health Equity Circles (HECs), inviting staff from all organizational levels for 45-minute discussions every other month to facilitate the inner work necessary to engage external stakeholders and ASTHO colleagues. With the goal of improving both internal dynamics and external partnerships, HECs are staff-led, informal, and virtual discussions centering around a pre-determined topic or article. HECs support ASTHO’s values of applying fair and equitable practices while fostering an environment where staff belong, feel safe to engage, and free to express ideas and perspectives.

HECs also demonstrate ASTHO’s intentional effort to uplift equity in a “One ASTHO” spirit. They have been critical in creating an internal culture that promotes a just and ethical place to work, as well as promoting internal Truth, Racial Healing, and Transformation (TRHT) work that aligns with ASTHO’s commitment to the health and racial equity goals outlined in the 2022-2024 [strategic plan](#). To achieve these goals, ASTHO engages in reflective discussions centered around health and racial equity that encourage power sharing across the organization. HECs provide the space to amplify the voices of teams and workgroups across the organization by facilitating discussions on topics relevant to their expertise.

How to Conduct a Workplace Health Equity Circle

Identify Primary Learning Considerations for Audience

1. Showcase agency internal and external efforts to advance health equity.
2. Provide a safe space for crucial conversations related to health and racial equity.
3. Exchange ideas to personally and/or professionally move from **discussion** to **action**.

Select Reading Materials and Discussion Topic

1. Select a journal article or grey literature that discusses a topic that would be helpful in pushing towards the operationalization of health equity. If the article is longer than a few pages, it’s helpful to provide a summary of three to four key points.
 - a. Topic examples to date have included the curb-cut effect, psychological safety, LGBTQIA+ rights and history, strength-based approaches to public health, and health equity in all policies.

Build a Timeline

1. Begin researching topics based on organizational culture and the needs of external partners three to four weeks prior to the meeting.

2. Send out an email with the article and discussion questions one to two weeks prior to the meeting.
 - a. Utilize organizational listserv if available to advertise the HEC.
3. Define internal learning objectives prior to the HEC.
4. Create a PowerPoint presentation to share at the HEC that includes:
 - a. Level-setting for the meeting that includes guidelines for engagement.
 - b. A summary of the reading materials.
 - c. The questions to be discussed.
 - d. Talking points that highlight clear connections between the organization and discussion topic.
5. Send out a reminder / summary email the week of the HEC.

Prepare Facilitators

1. Encourage authentic communication between participants of varying leadership roles within the organization with an emphasis on removing one's title from the conversation.
2. Incorporate readings to frame discussions around health equity related topics.
3. Meet staff where they are; invite intentionality about equity and engaging in a learning environment.
4. Be conscientious of the general landscape of your organization.

Share Guidelines with Participants

1. **Create a safe space.**
 - a. Encourage freedom to share, to be honest, and to be vulnerable.
 - b. What is shared is confidential, honored, and respected.
2. **Use "I" statements.** Focus on your own experiences. Avoid speaking for others or an entire group.
3. **Step up, step back.** If you tend to be quieter in groups, challenge yourself to share. If you tend to share, make sure there is space for others.
4. **Open hearts, open minds.**
 - a. The HEC is a no-judgement zone.
 - b. Be open to perspectives and experiences of others.
 - c. Listen with curiosity and a willingness to learn and change.
 - d. Resist the desire to interrupt.
 - e. Be open to the wisdom in each person's story.

Results and Participant Quotes

HEC participants reported feeling that their voices have a platform to be expressed. HECs can facilitate organizational improvement by providing a forum for open communication and discussions on equity issues. By allowing employees to voice their concerns and share ideas, organizations can identify areas for improvement and create a culture of equity. HECs also serve as a model for other public health organizations, providing a framework for facilitating courageous conversations.

"One of my favorite parts of the Health Equity Circle is that we give each other grace to reflect from a personal and professional standpoint. For folks that aren't directly involved in health equity projects, it's an opportunity to see how equity can and should be incorporated into our work and in our daily lives."

"This group reminds me that ASTHO is committed to operating through a health equity lens. It empowers to explore topics and issues that, while uncomfortable, are critical for us to move forward."

“The HEC creates momentum. It’s what I discover that propels me to action!”

Read about how [Health Equity Circles promote racial healing and understanding in the workplace](#) or [contact ASTHO's Health Equity team](#) for more information.

Appendix: Health Equity Circle Standard Operating Procedure and Example

PRE-PLANNING		
Select Facilitator	Dates	Notes
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Select a facilitator to discuss a health equity related topic based. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> At least three-four weeks prior to meeting 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The facilitator can be internal or external to the hosting team
Identify Article	Dates	Notes
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Have facilitator select article that meets predetermined criteria for inclusion 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> At least three-four weeks prior to meeting 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> PDF Attachment Link (If available)
VIRTUAL MEETING SPACE		
Written Description	Dates	Notes
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Schedule meeting 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> As soon as the article is chosen 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Security Options: Only check “Password” [insert password]
CALENDAR INVITATION		
Written Description	Dates	Notes
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Send calendar invitation 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> At least two to four weeks prior to Health Equity Circle 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Attach PDF List link (If available)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Identify two questions 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Completed prior to sending invitation 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> These two questions will be added to the calendar invitation Identify additional questions as a back-up or to help maintain conversation

CALENDAR INVITATION CHECKLIST AND SAMPLE INVITE

- | | |
|--|-------------------------|
| ✓ Invite from [Facilitating Team] to All Staff | ✓ Attach the Article |
| ✓ Description & Objectives (subject to change) | ✓ Include Platform Link |

Target Audience: Organization Staff

Example Description: The [Facilitating Team] introduces the Health Equity Circle. [Organization] staff will convene for an engaging virtual conversation facilitated by [Staffer/s] on the [journal article](#).

Learning Objectives: Participants will be able to...

- Learn about [organization’s] internal and external work to advance health equity.
- Provide a safe space for crucial conversations related to health and racial equity.
- Exchange ideas to personally and/or professionally move from **discussion** to **action**.

Questions to Consider

1. How can law be used as a communication tool to develop and disseminate the stories of the unheard and unseen people and communities to build support among policy makers and the public for advancing equity as a public health?
2. What roles do public health practitioners play in addressing hidden structural and systemic inequities that are difficult to trace because they are embedded in laws and accompanying policies and practices?

PROMOTION SAMPLES

Organizational Calendar	Dates	Notes
Send an email to [insert name] to post on calendar.	At least two weeks in advance from the scheduled HEC meeting, but ideally submit once for the year.	Make the description general (i.e., do not include the article and facilitator. These details will be included in the Outlook invitation).

Intended Audience: [organization] Staff (Optional Meeting)

Description: [facilitating team] introduces the Health Equity Circle. [organization] staff will convene for an engaging virtual conversation facilitated by the [facilitating team].

Dates	Notes
At least two weeks but ideally four weeks in advance.	Make the description general (Do not include the article and facilitator. These details will be included in the Outlook invitation).

WEEK OF SESSION

- Two days before HEC, attach PDF summary slide to calendar invitation and resend (as a reminder).
- Uncheck “Request Responses”
- Morning of HEC, send an email from [facilitating team’s email] to full staff listserv as Bcc.

Sample Email

Subject: Friendly Reminder & Prep | Today’s Health Equity Circle at 1 p.m. ET

Attached is a summary of the article in preparation for today’s Health Equity Circle. We look forward to a lively discussion!

Questions to Consider:

1. [Example Question 1]: How can law be used as a communication tool to develop and disseminate the stories of the unheard and unseen people and communities to build support among policy makers and the public for advancing equity as a public health?

2. [Example Question 2]: What roles do public health practitioners play in addressing hidden structural and systemic inequities that are difficult to trace because they are embedded in laws and accompanying policies and practices?

The **[facilitating team]**

[insert zoom or teams link]

POWERPOINT

Add a summary slide with a few key bullet points.

Calendar Message: *Attached is a summary of the article in preparation for Thursday's Health Equity Circle. We look forward to a lively discussion!*

- In addition to the summary slide, consider including slides about learning objectives, your equity team's work and staff bios, guidelines for engagement (as listed above), and the questions you plan to discuss.

How to Insert Music

In PowerPoint, go to the slide where you want to insert the content. **On the toolbar ribbon, select the Insert tab, select Video, and then select Online Video.** The Insert Video dialog box opens. Paste the embed code in the box named From a Video Embed Code, and then press Enter.

VIRTUAL MEETING

Virtual Meeting Platform

[insert virtual meeting link]

Virtual Meeting Event Day Reminders:

- Sign-in to virtual meeting platform and launch meeting early to change the settings to eliminate "Waiting Room."
- Suggest facilitator log-in at least 30 minutes in advance.
- Suggest **[facilitating team]** staff log-in at least 10-15 minutes in advance.
- Change name to: [facilitating team.]
- Add all **[facilitating team]** staff as co-host: [insert facilitators]
- Put participants on mute.
- All **[facilitating team]** feel free to join in the crucial conversation (verbally/chat).
- All **[facilitating team]** monitor chat and note parking lot topics.