

Identifying and Addressing Emerging Issues

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Part of embedding an adaptive learning and improvement orientation in your community is asking questions at your meetings to identify and address emerging system issues. One way to do this is to put some simple questions directly on your agenda.

Example Questions to put on the Agenda

How's it going with [goal] ?

- What's been working this past month?
 - Why did it work?
 - Do we need to share this with anyone?
- What hasn't been working this past month?
 - Why didn't it work?
 - What can we do about it? Who can we involve in this?

What goals should we ask these questions about?

- You can ask this question around a shared vision, such as promoting local health equity.
- You can also ask these questions around system conditions (e.g., coordination, access to services) or social determinant of health conditions (e.g., affordable housing, education, employment, etc.)

Tips for Clarifying

- If someone's response is vague or unclear, ask some questions to make sure you understand such as:
 - Can you give me an **example** of this?
 - **Who** does this issue involve or affect (do not need names, rather roles like pediatricians, low-income families, etc.)?
 - **Where** is this happening - which types of organizations or settings are involved (do not need specific names of organizations)

Tips for Moving to action

- Sometimes when you ask why things have been working or not working, you will immediately come to a root cause that is ready for action. Other times, you may have to ask why the situation is happening several times to really understand what underlying issues should be targeted with action.

Possible Follow-Up Questions

If you see people are having a hard time figuring out **why** a situation is happening, are jumping to a solution, or are mentioning victim blaming things (e.g., families don't use services because they are lazy), use some of these follow-up questions to help surface other potential issues.

NOTE: You should never ask all of these questions in any one conversation – pick the ones that make the most sense given the situation.

Why is this situation happening?

Then ask....

Mindsets

- What local **attitudes** or beliefs might be contributing to this situation? Which stakeholders hold these beliefs (e.g., leaders, staff, residents, etc.)?
- What **assumptions** do people make about why this situation is happening in our community?
- Do people see this situation as something that **needs to be changed**?

Components

- Are there any issues with the **quality** of local services/programs/efforts?
- Are there any issues with the **range** of available services/programs/efforts in the community?
- Are there any issues with the **accessibility** of local services/programs/efforts?
- Are there any issues with the **fit** of local services/programs/efforts with local families' needs and cultural traditions?

Connections

- Are there any issues with how **information is shared** between people or organizations?
- Are there any issues with how **referrals** are made?
- Are there any issues with how **resources** are shared?
- Are there any issues with the **alignment** between services and programs influencing this situation?

Regulations

- Are there any formal or informal **policies, procedures, or daily routines** influencing this situation? How are they getting in the way? Where are they in place?

Resources

- Are there any **skills or knowledge** that people currently lack?
- Are there any issues with the way **money** is currently allocated across the community?
- Are there issues with how **community resources** like transportation and living wage jobs are distributed across the community?

Power

- Are there any issues with decisions being made without necessary **input**?
- Are there issues with who has **influence** over decisions being made?
- Are there issues with who has access to **leadership roles** within the community?