



PROTOCOL	Capacity Building
RESOURCE/ACTIVITY	Identifying Problems of Practice (PoP)
DESCRIPTION	An interactive activity to learn about and develop Problems of Practice for a school or district.
ACTIVITY TIME	90 Minutes

Equity Outcomes:

Equity remains a foundational pillar of the Community Engagement Initiative, which is why we strongly recommend identifying and defining Equity Outcomes prior to completing an activity with the collective. We suggest these Equity Outcomes also be shared with the collective to demonstrate the collaborative effort to promote and advance equity through this initiative. Write the Equity Outcomes that will be met through this activity.

When to Use:

When there is a need for the collective to identify and address areas of improvement for a school or district.

Materials:

Scratch paper for note taking

Pens/Markers

Instructions

Note: The following steps can be spread out through multiple meetings, if necessary.

Activity Prep.: In preparation for this activity, and if appropriate, facilitator may conduct the “Developing a Theory of Action” activity from Protocol 2: Capacity Building, as a Theory of Action may be directly tied to Problems of Practice. If appropriate, a completed Theory of Action can be helpful for the group to reference.

Step 1: Brainstorming Problems of Practice (20 Minutes)

Share with participants that we are going to work on identifying and exploring problems of practice within education.

Let participants know that problems of practice are defined as “an area that a school or school district identifies that focuses on the instructional core, is directly observable, is actionable, and connects to a broader strategy of improvement.”

To reiterate and emphasize, let participants know that problems of practice must be:

- Core to instruction at a school or within a school district
- Observable
- Actionable
- Connects to a broader strategy of improvement

Share with participants the following examples of problems of practice to further understanding of problems of practice:

- 34% of students feel like they don’t belong.
- Teachers don’t effectively plan and develop lessons that increase student engagement and rigor.

- Communication between families and teachers is infrequent, not consistently actionable, and sometimes not aligned.
- 52% of students received a failing grade in at least one class last semester.
- The diversity of our teaching staff doesn't reflect the diversity of our community.
- Our Foster Youth have a chronic absenteeism rate of 28%.

Next, share with participants why identifying problems of practice would be beneficial to our collective work, including:

- Teams can document their process for working through their problem of practice, resulting in a "journey" that can be shared with stakeholders.
- Problems of practice are likely to align to work that is already ongoing internally.
- Exploring problems of practice ties directly to an organization's Theory of Action, which is most applicable for groups who normally work together as a collective to achieve a specific outcome.

Ask participants if they have any questions about the topic of this activity.

Address any questions and concerns participants may have about the topic of this activity.

Next, share with participants that they will work in teams to identify their problem of practice.

Provide participants with the Notetaking Worksheet for Problems of Practice. See "Resources" section for link to handout.

Share with participants that in their teams, they will conduct a brainstorm of what they think their school and/or school district problems of practice may be.

To guide their brainstorm, let teams know they should use the following checklist to ensure it meets the criteria for problems of practice:

- Familiar to all team members
- Based on a specific issue
- Actionable and realistic
- Able to close an identified gap
- Without a simple, singular solution

Once teams have verified their brainstorm, ask teams to select one problem of practice they would like to focus on. This will be the priority of each team's work.

Note: Teams may choose a problem of practice that is specific to community engagement, OR a problem of practice that is systemic and can be addressed/strengthened by enhancing community engagement practices.

Step 2: Refining Problems of Practice (25 Minutes)

Next, let teams know they will refine their problems of practice to ensure it remains the problem of practice they think their school and/or school district should be focusing on.

Remind teams that a problem of practice is generally something that you might want to hide when you have visitors.

To refine their problem of practice, let teams know they should answer the following questions to ensure it continues to meet the criteria for problems of practice:

- Is it measurable?
- Do you have or can you develop a metric?
- Is it manageable?
- Is the problem within your locus of control?
- Is it meaningful?
- Will a solution make a difference for struggling students and families?

If the team answers 'yes' to all these questions, they can continue on with this activity.

If the team does not answer 'yes' to all these questions, encourage teams to brainstorm ways to modify their problem of practice.

Teams may choose to focus on another problem of practice, especially if it meets all criteria.

Allow participants 20 minutes to gather with their team to brainstorm and refine their problem of practice through the presented criteria.

When 20 minutes have passed, instruct participants to return to the main group.

Next, ask for a team representative to read their team's problem of practice with the main group.

Thank all teams for sharing.

Step 3: Problems of Practice Team Exchange (45 Minutes)

Next, let participants know that they will work in teams to further build upon their problem of practice.

Share with participants that in their teams, they will:

- Identify the **reason** and **rationale** for exploring their selected problem of practice
- Explain the **value** in focusing on and diving deeply into their selected problem of practice

Allow participants 15 minutes to gather with their team to discuss the reason/rationale and value of their selected problem of practice.

When 15 minutes have passed, collect each team's notes from their problem of practice and re-distribute the notes to allow a team exchange. Ensure that each team has a problem of practice that is not their own.

Note: Verify that notes are labeled with each team's name before collecting.

Next, let teams know that they will review another team's problem of practice, using the criteria set forth in the brainstorm and refine sections of this activity.

After review of the criteria and the other team's problem of practice, ask teams to develop 5 questions that will be asked of the group whose problem of practice they are reviewing.

Encourage the review team to ask challenging questions! Difficult questions with answers and that require thought are a gift.

Allow teams 10 minutes to discuss the other team's problem of practice and develop 5 questions to be asked to that team.

When 10 minutes have passed, ask each team to select a representative, who joins the team whose problem of practice they reviewed to ask the questions.



	<p>Allow team representatives to locate and join the other team and exchange introductions, if necessary.</p> <p>When all team representatives have located their assigned teams, invite them to ask the questions they developed for the district team they are visiting about their problem of practice.</p> <p>Teams should record the questions and their corresponding answers.</p> <p>Allow teams 10 minutes to ask and discuss their questions.</p> <p>When 10 minutes have passed, ask the team representatives to rejoin their own team.</p> <p>At this time, redistribute each problem of practice to its original team.</p> <p>Next, let teams know that they will have an opportunity to discuss the questions that were asked from the representative. Let teams know that during this time, they are encouraged to continue refining their problem of practice, if they find it necessary and appropriate to do so.</p> <p>Allow teams 10 minutes to discuss questions from the representative and continue refining their problem of practice, if applicable.</p> <p>When 10 minutes have passed, instruct participants to return to the main group.</p> <p>Next, ask for a team representative to share the following:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Their problem of practice ● How they selected it ● Why it matters ● For whom it matters <p>When each team has shared, remind participants that these problems of practice will be the focus of their team’s work together. Encourage participants to periodically revisit and review these problems of practice throughout our work as a collective, to ensure they are being acknowledged in the process of our work.</p> <p>When the activity is complete, thank all participants for participating.</p>
Resources	Notetaking Worksheet for Problems of Practice