

Committee Discussions Using Probing Equity Questions

Goal: Normalize use of lens by legislators and community members

Remember: these *will* require practice, for everyone. Finding your voice and using it, using the questions, and analyzing bills well, will all take practice.

- Ask the chair during the first few days of committee meetings: “*At what point in bill consideration will committee members have opportunities to ask questions?*” This serves a few purposes:
 - Primes Chair to know of your plans to use lens
 - Asks Chair to find time for you to ask the questions
 - Gets it on the record that you plan to ask lens questions

Very generally speaking, following are the steps within the committee process:

- Bill request is made to legislative counsel. (Ideally, this is where PQ would be applied for the first time.)
- *Bill draft sent to Legislator for review and request for sponsors.*
- Legislative counsel drafts and sends bill to the Clerk of the House, who gives it a number; Speaker assigns bill to committee.
- Committee chair, in collaboration with committee members or alone, decides what bill/s to take up. Q
- Committee chair picks witnesses, *in collaboration with committee members or alone*, to speak to various aspects of bill. These may be members of the governor’s administration, advocates, community members, members of the business community, people affected by the bill’s enactment, as well as legal counsel who drafted or can speak to the language of the bill as drafted. Lens questions may be included here.
- Committee discussion of the bill— getting close to the committee vote and the end of the bill’s process at the committee level. Committee members may bring up lens questions at this point, but mostly they are encouraged to express thoughts about the bill.
- Committee vote: a good place to voice lens questions that were not addressed during examination, but don’t expect the questions to be answered.
- House floor: last time to voice (*pq*) objections, but be very careful here and employ much discretion.

Reminder of the Probing Equity Lens Questions:

1. Overarching goal:
 - How does the proposed legislation distribute wealth and resources to increase social well-being for racial/ethnic groups most adversely impacted?
2. Who?

- Which individuals benefit from the proposed bill?
 - If BIPOC, LGBTQ+, disability, and migrant communities do not benefit, how can they?
3. Why?
 - Why does the legislative committee seek to address this issue?
 - Is the purpose of the legislation to uplift the communities most adversely impacted?
 - What evidence has informed this bill?
 4. Engagement
 - How is the committee being informed by the people most impacted by the outcomes of the proposed bill?
 - What resources are needed to engage the voices and experiences of BIPOC, LGBTQ+, disability and migrant communities in the formulation of the bill?
 - How will these communities be engaged in the evaluation of its success?
 - Does the language/terminology of the bill reflect the self-identity of any groups mentioned; are terms included that might be considered hurtful or damaging in nature; and does the language reflect the temporal nature of social identity terms?
 5. Timeline: How quickly will the communities most affected by racial and social inequities begin to benefit from the proposed bill?
 6. Repairing Harm:
 - How does the bill address recovery and repair of broken relationships by dismantling systemic structures that cause harm?
 - How will the bill provide for more equitable and just systems for all Vermonters?
 - Could the bill have disparate negative impacts on underrepresented groups? If yes, how can disparate impact be mitigated?
 - Could the bill have disparate negative impacts on marginalized or underrepresented groups? If yes, how can the disparate impact be mitigated?