

Surfacing Assumptions in Education
Request for Participants & Nominations for Participants for a Focus Group
November 2019

AssumptionScope is an innovative project whose purpose is to surface the assumptions operating within our major social and societal systems & institutions so that those assumptions, their validity, and their implications for the design of those systems can be consciously reflected upon by stakeholders.

AssumptionScope will focus on five institutions: Education, Health Care, Governance & Politics, Economy, and Justice.

The general sequence of the activity is as follows:

- (a) **Surface** an initial set of observed assumptions with one or more groups of people intimately familiar with the system,
- (b) **Validate and refine** that set by inviting review by a wider group of people familiar with the system, and
- (c) **Exhibit** the resulting set of assumptions in a permanent, public, interactive forum through which all stakeholders, including the general public, are invited to reflect upon and indicate their level of agreement with the assumptions.

The **rationale** behind the project is that while all of the features of our social and societal systems are underlain by assumptions, including core ideas and values, those assumptions (by definition) tend to remain unexamined. This is problematic because when left unexamined, the systems on which the assumptions are built are at risk of diminished “goodness of fit” with new knowledge, with the needs of society, and with the aspirations of stakeholders. This reduced fitness can, in turn, fuel problems and “crises” that cannot be effectively addressed.

We’re currently seeking individuals who would be willing to participate in a focus group/workshop and help to surface & articulate assumptions operating in education.

The Focus Group

The purpose of the focus group is to create an initial set of observed assumptions operating in our predominant education system(s). The scope is broad, encompassing every dimension of education. We will provide a framework and process for the articulation of assumptions and any clarification required. There may not be consensus about every observed assumption, but the process will be designed to converge toward a greater consensus in subsequent stages.

The rationale for using a focus group rather than an alternative approach, such as a survey, is because a group setting can help inspire greater insights, contribution, and clarity.

Who is Facilitating the Focus Group?

The focus group will be lead by project organizer Matthew Shapiro, who is a former teacher and a former doctoral candidate in curriculum and instruction at Boise State University.

Time Frame and Time Commitment

We intend to conduct the focus group in January 2020, at a date and time that fits best with participant schedules. **Two hours** should be allowed for the focus group session.

Significance of the Project

AssumptionScope is a unique project and a potentially powerful catalyst for institutional introspection. It is hoped that successful piloting of AssumptionScope in our community could lead to more widespread use and could help lay the groundwork for meaningful and effective participatory design of social systems & public institutions.

Benefits to Participants

Participants will be people who are already involved with and care about education. The focus group will provide a unique opportunity to consider education and education systems from the inside out. The experience, and any dialogue triggered within the focus group, will likely be intellectually stimulating, challenging, and enriching. Participants may also appreciate the significance of their eventual contribution to raising awareness of the core ideas and core values underlying education systems.

Confidentiality

Participants are not being asked to divulge any personal information, and participant names will not be associated with any of the statements added to the assumptions set. Any recording of the focus group would be done only with the permission of all participants, and any use of such recording (such as for documenting and learning from the process) would only be done with the permission of all participants.

About The Boise Commons

The Boise Commons is a local non-profit, nonpartisan organization dedicated to building civic capacity in Boise and the greater Treasure Valley. By *civic capacity* is meant the capacity for people to more deeply, meaningfully, and actively participate in the public life of their community and society. Our interests and projects focus on deeper dimensions of issues and on longer-term solutions rather than on immediate problems and short-term solutions. More information can be found on our website, <http://boisecommons.org>.

If you may be interested in participating in this focus group, and/or if there are people who you would suggest we reach out to about participation, please

contact: Matthew Shapiro, mshapiro@boisecommons.org, (208) 246-9925