

Culturally Specific Services:

Multnomah County believes Culturally Specific Services eliminate structural barriers and provide a sense of safety and belonging that will lead to better outcomes for people.

CULTURALLY SPECIFIC WORKGROUP RECOMMENDATIONS - 10/2015

In the Spring of 2015, Multnomah County's Culturally Specific Workgroup was convened by Multnomah County COO Marissa Madrigal and Chief Diversity and Equity Officer Ben Duncan to review best practices, solicit local and national advice and create a common, county-wide definition of culturally specific services that follows applicable state and federal laws.

Additionally, the group was charged with developing technical guidance for programs procuring culturally specific services, creating uniformity and consistency in practice and providing predictability for the community. This document serves as a guidance document for the definitions, but does not outline the evaluative and scoring criteria to be used in an RFP process. Multnomah County is piloting the integration of definitions into the SUN RFP process.

The workgroup has finalized its initial recommendations, which are rooted in the following beliefs:

Culturally Specific Services eliminate structural barriers and provide a sense of safety and belonging that will lead to better outcomes for people experiencing racism and discrimination.

All services Multnomah County provides should be culturally responsive, and organizations competing for county contracts should demonstrate their capacity through the RFP process. An updated definition of Culturally Responsive Services is an additional recommendation provided in Attachment A.

The workgroup believes that in order to provide equitable opportunity for individual and community success, the county must consider and strategize to eliminate structural barriers which contribute to poor outcomes for people experiencing racism and discrimination. As important, the workgroup believes and studies support¹²³⁴ that the best environment to fuel success is one that is safe and provides a sense of belonging.

¹ http://www.heinz.org/UserFiles/Library/Culture-Report_FINAL.pdf

² Bloom, Sandra. "Trauma Theory Abbreviated." Final Action Plan: A Coordinated Community Response To Violence. October, 1999

³ <http://www.nwaf.org/content/uploads/2014/12/PMpowell.pdf>

⁴ Eisenberger NI, & Cole SW (2012). Social neuroscience and health: neurophysiological mechanisms linking social ties with physical health. *Nature neuroscience*, 15 (5), 669-74 PMID: 22504347

The recommended definition for organizations providing Culturally Specific Services aims to outline the organizational and programmatic elements necessary to eliminate structural barriers and create environments that ensure safety and belonging.

RECOMMENDED DEFINITION

Organizations providing Culturally Specific Services demonstrate alignment of founding mission with the community proposed to be served (creation of mission was historically based in serving communities experiencing racism) and alignment with the outcomes desired by the program.

Organizations providing Culturally Specific Services demonstrate intimate knowledge of lived experience of the community, including but not limited to the impact of structural and individual racism or discrimination on the community; knowledge of specific disparities documented in the community and how that influences the structure of their program or service; ability to describe the community's cultural practices, health and safety beliefs/practices, positive cultural identity/pride/resilience, immigration dynamics, religious beliefs, etc. and how their services have been adapted to those cultural norms.

Organizations providing Culturally Specific Services demonstrate multiple formal and informal channels for meaningful community engagement, participation and feedback exists at all levels of the organization (from service complaints to community participation at the leadership and board level). Those channels are constructed within the cultural norms, practices, and beliefs of the community, and affirm the positive cultural identity/pride/resilience of the community. Community participation can and does result in desired change.

Organizations providing Culturally Specific Services demonstrate commitment to a highly skilled and experienced workforce by employing robust recruitment, hiring and leadership development practices including but not limited to valuing and screening for community and/or lived experience; requirements for professional and personal references from within the community; training standards; professional development opportunities and performance monitoring.

Organizations providing Culturally Specific Services demonstrate commitment to safety and belonging through advocacy; design of services from the norms and worldviews of the community; reflect core cultural constructs of the culturally specific community; understand and incorporate shared history; create rich support networks; engage all aspects of community; and address power relationships.

OTHER LESSONS AND NEXT STEPS

While the group was tasked specifically with reviewing the definition of Culturally Specific Services, the discussion and information collected provided other important learnings and context the workgroup feels should be captured and acted on by the County.

A transformational shift in thinking: Targeted Universalism⁵

⁵ http://www.prrac.org/full_text.php?text_id=1223&item_id=11577&newsletter_id=104&header=Miscellaneous&kc=1

The County, and indeed organizations across the country have defined the success of their services, and therefore community success, as the “elimination of racial and ethnic disparities.” Simply put, we believe this definition of success doesn’t set the bar high enough. If as a community we are successful in eliminating disparities to educational success, bringing high school graduation rates for children of color to the same level as white children, we would still only be graduating 68%⁶ of Oregon students. We believe a more useful construct is to challenge ourselves to reach 100% success for all communities and employ a variety of strategies, including Culturally Responsive and Culturally Specific programming to get there.

Culturally Responsive Services in a multi-cultural context

As the workgroup discussed the importance of eliminating structural barriers and creating safety and belonging, we also grappled with the reality that as our community continues to diversify, all our services must be provided in a way that is culturally responsive to the varied and intersecting “biological, social and cultural categories such as gender identity, race, class, ability, sexual orientation, religion, caste, and other axes of identity”⁷ that are present in our community.

Next Steps

The definition of Culturally Specific Services that has been developed is generalized for use across the county and adaptable to specific communities. However, to stay true to our values and develop as a culturally responsive organization, we must solicit input from the individual culturally specific communities we wish to serve to ensure that the definition of culturally specific services Multnomah County uses is aligned with community needs and expectations.

The new definitions of both Organizations providing Culturally Specific Services and Culturally Responsive Services will be piloted in the 2015 SUN Service System Request for Proposals in the Department of County Human Services. It is through this pilot that we will develop and refine technical assistance documents for other county staff. We plan to maintain the membership of the workgroup as an ad hoc committee to ensure successful implementation of the definitions, help communicate the change, and assist in trouble-shooting as we test our process and assumptions⁸.

CONCLUSION

It was clear Multnomah County was not internally consistent in its beliefs, definitions or usage of Culturally Specific Services at the beginning of our examination. While the work was not easy, linear nor without risk, the clarity we have achieved through our conversation is worth restating:

Culturally Specific Services eliminate structural barriers and provide a sense of safety and belonging that will lead to better outcomes for people.

⁶ Class of 2012 http://www.oregonlive.com/education/index.ssf/2013/01/oregon_schools_fail_to_budge_t.html#incart_m-rpt-2

⁷ <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Intersectionality>

⁸ See attached action plan

About the workgroup:

MEMBERSHIP

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CONTEXT, PROCESS & ATTACHMENTS

Culturally Specific Services have been utilized by Multnomah County for many years as a strategy to best serve culturally isolated communities experiencing racism and discrimination. As the workgroup began its discussion, it examined current definitions and purchasing practices; county and community values; and local, state and federal laws.

Led by Sonali S. Balajee, the Office of Diversity and Equity conducted a literature review and stakeholder interviews both within and outside the county. Additionally, ODE worked closely with Professor John Powell of the Haas Institute and founder of the Governing Alliance for Racial Equity, seeking additional legal and definition review, integrating promising practices in targeted universalism, othering, belonging, and racial equity, and securing in-person educational sessions for the workgroup. Between workgroup meetings, ODE synthesized all forms of research to create drafts of the definitions and accompanying narrative for the workgroup to respond and react to, utilizing the Equity and Empowerment Lens and other key racial equity tools to maintain focus on improving outcomes for all communities.

Glossary:

STRUCTURAL BARRIERS - *Structural barriers are formal and informal rules that regulate an entire system of interaction, that set up impediments leading to unequal experiences of opportunities and life chances for marginalized communities. In relation to structural racism, structural barriers, when present and unquestioned, keep racial hierarchies in place, and can include legal barriers, organizational climate, and procedures or policies that disadvantage communities of color and advantage White people. (powell, john. "Social Justice Movement and The Role of Government." Kirwan Institute. [presentation]. 2010., and powell, john. Racing To Justice. 2012)*

RACISM -*Conduct, words, practices or policies which advantage or disadvantage people based on their culture, ethnic origin or color. Racism is just as damaging in obvious forms as it is in less obvious and subtle forms, and is still called racism whether intentional or unintentional (Lopes & Thomas, 2006). Racism is "a system in which one group of people exercises power over another or others on the basis of social constructed categories based on distinctions of physical attributes such as skin color" (Galabuzi, 2006, p.252, cited in Curry-Stevens, A., Cross-Hemmer, A., & Coalition of Communities of Color [2010]. Communities of Color in Multnomah County: An Unsettling Profile. Portland, OR: Portland State University)*

- **INDIVIDUAL RACISM**- *Manifests at the individual level privately as prejudices, unconscious bias, and internalized oppression, and can also appear interpersonally between people in the form of directly perceived discriminatory interactions which are harmful in their subtle as well as overt forms. (Lopes & Thomas, 2006, p.270)*

- **INSTITUTIONAL RACISM** – *"The network of institutional structures, policies, and practices that create advantages for White people and discrimination, oppression and disadvantage for racialized people." (Lopes & Thomas, 2006, p.270, cited in Balajee, Sonali S., et al., (2012). Equity and Empowerment Lens (Racial Justice Focus). Portland, OR: Multnomah County) Institutional racism consists of those established laws, customs and practices which systematically reflect and produce racial inequalities... whether or not the individuals maintaining those practices have racist intentions (Jones, 1972, p.131, as cited in Curry-Stevens, A., and Cross-Hemmer, A., p. 140)*

- **SYSTEMIC RACISM** – *"The conscious or unconscious policies, procedures, and practices that exclude, marginalize, and exploit racialized people. Systemic racism is supported by institutional power and by powerful (often unexamined) ideas which make racism look normal and justified. Systemic racism allows individuals to practice racism in organizations, unchecked by effective complaints procedures, performance appraisals, and promotions which require equity competencies" (Lopes & Thomas, p.270).*

DISCRIMINATION -unequal or different treatment of an individual in any personnel action on the basis of race, color, sex, age, religion, national origin, political affiliation, marital status, sexual orientation, gender identity, source of income, familial status, or physical or mental disability or other protected class in accordance with applicable law (Multnomah County)

BELONGING - when social relationships provide a sense of meaning in life, more than just bonding, but an individual really feeling they are fitting in. Feeling that life is meaningful leads to increased likelihood of positive psychological and physical health, promotes the ideas of continuity and permanence, and is found in various ways, including through family, religion and spirituality, community connection, and sense of self. (To Belong is to Matter: Sense of Belonging Enhances Meaning in Life; Lambert et al. 2013)

Experiencing a sense of belonging occurs when the design of societal level arrangements is inclusive to all, being especially sensitive to the most marginalized and multiply disadvantaged.

Belonging-related activities encourage positive group and intergroup relations, creating and maintaining conditions of safety, healing, and restoration, creating social trust across group boundaries, and expanding the circle of human concern. Othering of the self, of each other, and of the environment decrease the experience and reality of a sense of belonging. (Adapted from powell, john a., and Menendian, Stephen. "The Problem of Othering: Towards Inclusiveness and Belonging." Haas Institute.)

COMMUNITY - Community occurs when a group of people form a social unit based on common interest, location, culture, identification and/or activities. Three dimensions of community are: "(1) a place or geographic locale in which one's needs for sustenance are met, (2) a pattern of social interactions, and (3) a symbolic identification that gives meaning to one's sense of personal identity and sense of personal connectedness." (Glisson, Charles A., Dulmus, Catherine N., and Showers, Karen. Social Work Practice with Groups, Communities, and Organizations: Evidence-based Assessment and Interventions. 2012. Original citation from Fellon [2008].)

CULTURAL CONSTRUCT -A cultural construct is a shared understanding of some aspect of the world that exists because the people of a specific culture understand that thing to exist. Although it sounds the same as "culture", a "cultural construct" is a specific belief or understanding about something in the world (deemed as 'natural' or not). (Adapted from social construction theory)

SOCIAL NORMS - Encompasses core and enduring social values, knowledge, attitudes, and behaviors. Striving for a shift in social norms is a critical outcome area to positively change culture, beliefs, and behaviors. (Balajee, Sonali S., et al., (2012). Equity and Empowerment Lens (Racial Justice Focus). Portland, OR: Multnomah County.)

DISPARITIES - Differences in social indicators which are not only unnecessary and avoidable but, in addition, are considered unfair and unjust. (Adapted from the WHO definition.)

OUTCOMES AND OUTPUTS - *Outcomes are the differences made by the strategies and interventions used (such as changes in behavior, quality improvement, learning, etc), versus outputs which are the things completed that can be counted (# of trainings, # of strategic plans completed). “Outputs are important products, services, profits, and revenues: the What. Outcomes create meanings, relationships, and differences: the Why. Outputs, such as revenue and profit, enable us to fund outcomes; but without outcomes, there is no need for outputs.” (Mills-Scofield, Deborah. “It’s Not Just Semantics: Managing Outcomes versus Outputs.” Harvard Business Review. November 26, 2012.)*

Attachment A: Culturally Responsive Services

"Culturally responsive services are those that are respectful of, and relevant to, the beliefs, practices, culture and linguistic needs of diverse consumer / client populations and communities whose members identify as having particular cultural or linguistic affiliations by virtue of their place of birth, ancestry or ethnic origin, religion, preferred language or language spoken at home. Cultural responsiveness describes the capacity to respond to the issues of diverse communities. It thus requires knowledge and capacity at different levels of intervention: systemic, organizational, professional, and individual."⁹

A culturally responsive organization is one that reflects the following characteristics:

The organization prioritizes responsivity to the interests of communities experiencing inequities racism and provides “culturally grounded interventions [that] have been designed and developed starting from the values, behaviors, norms, and worldviews of the populations they are intended to serve), and therefore most closely connected to the lived experiences and core cultural constructs of the targeted populations and communities.”¹⁰ Culturally responsive organizations affirmatively adopt and integrate the cultural and social norms and practices of the communities they serve.¹¹

A culturally responsive organization seeks to address power relationships comprehensively throughout its own organization, through both the types of services provided and its human resources practices. A key way of doing this is engaging in critical analysis of the organization’s cultural norms, relationships, and structures, promoting those that support democratic engagement, healing relationships and environments. Culturally responsive organizations value and prioritize relationships with people and communities experiencing inequities universally, paying particular attention to communities experiencing racism and discrimination. Culturally responsive organizations commit to continuous quality improvement by tracking and regularly reporting progress, and being deeply responsive to community needs. A culturally responsive organization strives to eliminate barriers and enhance what is working.

Culturally responsive organizations seek to build change through these major domains¹²:

⁹ Curry-Stevens, A., Reyes, M.E. & Coalition of Communities of Color (2014). *Protocol for Culturally Responsive Organizations*. Portland, OR: Center to Advance Racial Equity, Portland State University.

¹⁰ Okamoto, Scott K., Kulis, Stephen, Marsiglia, Flavio F., Holleran Steiker, Lori K., Dustamna, J. “A Continuum of Approaches Toward Developing Culturally Focused Prevention Interventions: From Adaptation to Grounding. *Primary Prevention*. (2014) 35:103-112 DOI. 10.1007/s10935-013-0334-z

¹¹ powell, john. Interview. September 8, 2015.

¹² Curry-Stevens, et al.

communities they serve.¹¹

- Organizational commitment, leadership, and governance
- Racial equity policies and implementation practice
- Organizational climate, culture, and communications
- Service-based equity and relevance
- Workforce composition and quality
- Community collaboration
- Resource allocation and contracting practices
- Data metrics and continuous quality improvement