

A Working Definition of Cultural Competency

Adopted by the
Minority Executive Directors Coalition
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Preamble:

MEDC believes that cultural competency is critical to the success of the delivery of health & human services in an ever diverse environment. The respect of an individual's cultural domains and their experiences is essential to their engagement with service providers, consultants, trainers, researchers & funders. Through an organization's recognition of cultural competent services, staff and volunteers, it will be much better able to meet the diverse needs in all communities throughout King County. Organizations that embrace the four guiding principles of Cultural Competency must be willing to accept them throughout their organization's services, policies & practices. Cultural Competency is a journey by which an agency must commit itself to a process of continuous improvement.

- *Cultural Competency is defined as “a set of behaviours, attributes and policies enabling an agency (or individual) to work effectively in cross cultural situations”¹. Cultural Competency is further defined in the terms of the following three guiding principles:*

- I. Commitment**
- II. Accessibility**
- III. Relevance**

- I. Commitment** – A commitment that social change is necessary and includes:

- Acknowledgment that institutional racism exists at all levels of the service delivery system; - in policy and in practice.
- Recognition that cultural differences exist – between and within groups; - that people of color think, feel and behave differently and cannot and should not be measured against the dominant culture.

- II. Accessibility**

- Opportunities to services, trainings and funding must be made available to all communities of color.
- Assurance that at least the same range of choices and level of services are available among all communities of color.
- Services are located within communities of color.
- There is a purposeful elimination of barriers to service.
- There is maintenance of bilingual/bicultural staff in all service areas.
- There are decentralized points of entry in order to access services.

- III. Relevance**

¹ Taken from the Santa Cruz County Probation definition of Cultural Competence.

- Services are delivered in a manner relevant to the client in a way that is meaningful and congruent with the client's class, language, culture belief, environment, concept of time and spiritual and religious beliefs.
- Services are sensitive to cultural differences in decision making and life events, including minority status, oppression experiences, world-views and immigrations status etc.
- Services are delivered by staff who are culturally competent.
- Services involve and respect resources existent within the communities – traditional or nontraditional.
- Services recognize the role of the community as well as personal problem solving.
- Services are delivered through organizations that have a staff and management composition reflective of their client community.
- There are steps taken, at the policy and operational levels, by the organization to insure continuation of progress made in establishing the Guiding Principles of Cultural Competency.
- There is an aggressive plan for recruiting, training and retaining staff and volunteers of color throughout the organization.

Implementation of Guiding Principles

In order to effectively implement the Guiding Principles for Cultural Competency, there must be an understanding of the history of institutionalized racism and its context as it affects the delivery of human services.

Commitment Implementation:

Service Providers: There should be:

- A recognition of the limitations of the service delivery system
- A commitment to recruit, train, retain and advance staff and volunteers of color who understand the history and context of institutional racism.

Consultants/Trainers: There should be:

- An understanding of the history of institutional racism and its context.
- An appreciation for the various ways of learning, especially within and among communities of color.

Research is performed with:

- An appreciation of the three Guiding Principles of Cultural Competency
- An understanding of the differences within and among communities of color.

Funders: There must be:

- A documented commitment to cultural competency through approved policies related to funding recommendations
- Education of policy makers to the importance of Cultural Competency.

Accessibility Implementation:

Service Providers:

- Services are provided by bilingual/bicultural staff of color who are recognized as knowledgeable in the field of health and human services.
- That the same breadth of service is offered at more than one location.
- The recruitment, retention and promotion of culturally competent staff of color at all levels of the organization.
- A review of all available data where services need to be delivered for specific communities of color.

Consultants/Trainers:

- Whenever necessary, trainings are offered in languages other than English.
- Offer the trainings at times that are culturally sensitive and fitting with the audience's concept of time and need for social interaction.
- Need to recognize that their services need to be delivered through the sponsorship or co-sponsorship of community-based agencies of color.
- Whenever possible, conduct trainings with a facilitator of color who is knowledgeable of the ethnic group to whom they are presenting.

Research:

- Is performed by researchers knowledgeable of the issues facing communities of color through culturally appropriate means.
- Decision-makers will be inclusive of communities of color at all levels.

Relevance Implementation:

Service Providers:

- An organized workplan to deliver services in the above manner

Consultants/Trainers:

- Bilingual/bicultural trainers who are knowledgeable of the topic to be discussed
- Trainings that draw upon the history and richness of various ethnic experiences

Researchers:

- Research needs to be relevant to the issues affecting communities of color and build upon the assets of the various impacted communities.

Funders:

- Materials used to seek applications as well as application materials will be culturally appropriate.
- Outcomes are funded with an eye towards considering the value of cultural competency

Continuity and Succession Implementation:

Service Providers:

- Staff of color at all levels of the organization, are recruited, trained, promoted and retained in a manner that builds upon their expertise.
- Policy boards work aggressively to insure the full participation of representatives from the communities of color they serve.

Consultants/Trainers:

- Trainings are offered by competent consultants of color who are knowledgeable about the topic being presented.

Research:

- Needs have built in opportunities for continued review of findings that impact communities of color in order to maintain research in areas that are of current relevance.

Funders:

- Funders hire staff and volunteers who are trained in cultural competency. Funding applications utilize the four Guiding Principles of cultural competency in making decisions.

How to Use This Definition:

- Policy Implications
 - Board & staff policies must be updated to reflect Cultural Competency elements
 - Participant policies & procedures will need to be reviewed to be sure they are consistent with the definition
- Program Implications
 - Program outcomes may need to be reviewed in terms of meeting the elements of the definition
 - Additions or subtraction of program elements may occur in order to meet the indicators set forth within the definition
- Mission Implications
 - The organization's mission may need to be reviewed in order to address the elements contained within the definition
 - Review and certification of Culturally Competent programs, agencies, trainings, research and or procedures are available.

References:

- Examples of Culturally Competent board policies and procedures
- Examples of Culturally Competent program services, trainings and procedures
- Examples of how to measure Culturally Competent funding requests

Endorsements (examples of possible ones we could solicit)

MEDC membership

City of Seattle

Pacific Northwest Grantmakers Forum

United Way of King County
King County
City of Bellevue
Specific Agencies

MEDC's Mission is to bring together non-profit agency executives who are people of color working in King County to advocate for and develop resources on behalf of minority constituencies in order to improve social and human services, increase funding, and expand the role of people of color in public and private policy making.