

January 26, 2006

**TO:** NASW Members

**FROM:** Chair, National Committee on Racial and Ethnic Diversity

**RE:** Indicators for Cultural Competence in Social Work Practice

This document of proposed indicators for cultural competence is a product of the National Committee on Racial and Ethnic Diversity (NCORED). The recommendations presented herein are posted for members' review and discussion. Comments are welcomed and should be sent to [ccncored@naswdc.org](mailto:ccncored@naswdc.org) within 60 days (no later than April 21, 2006).

The committee will be revising the contents of this document in preparation of its final submission to the national Board of Directors for approval. We value your input. Please take time to look the document over, discuss it with your colleagues if possible and give us your recommendations and comments. We look forward to hearing from you. Thank you.

**Proposed**  
**Indicators for levels of achievement of the**  
***NASW Standards on Cultural Competence in Social Work Practice***  
**Developed by the NASW National Committee on Racial and Ethnic Diversity**

The *NASW Standards on Cultural Competence in Social Work Practice* were first presented in draft form to NASW members attending a Town Hall Meeting sponsored by The National Committee on Racial and Ethnic Diversity (NCORED) during Social Work 2000 in Baltimore Maryland. NASW members requested that NCORED follow-up their accomplishments by developing outcome measures that could serve as guideposts to achieving levels of cultural competency by social workers. The discussion centered on the need for self-assessment tools for individual social workers, for supervisors to be able to assess their social work employees' cultural competency levels, and for agency administrators to understand how culturally competent their services are. The same issue was also raised during the public comment period for the Standards.

Today's most frequently asked questions in the field of cultural competency are:

- How do we know when we achieve cultural competency?
- How do we know where we are on a cultural competency continuum?

We have anecdotal information that faculties in schools of social work are also striving to teach cultural competency skills and that many are using the NASW Standards in their efforts.

Having developed the *Standards of Cultural Competence in Social Work Practice*, an historical accomplishment for the profession, NCORED drafted indicators for each cultural competence standard. The NASW Board of Directors has provided comments and feedback on the draft document. **We ask for your comments as well. Please give special attention to how this document could serve as an effective evaluative tool.**

The attached *Indicators for Cultural Competence in Social Work Practice* are grounded on the principles, standards, and values specified in the NASW and social work profession's mission, NASW Code of Ethics (1999), and NASW Standards for Cultural Competence in Social Work Practice (2001). Consistent with these foundations, the Indicators help make practical precisely what NASW's Preamble to the Code of Ethics says: “. . . Social workers are sensitive to cultural and ethnic diversity and strive to end discrimination, oppression, poverty, and other forms of social injustice. . . .” (*NASW Code of Ethics* (1999), p. 1).

The indicators contained herein focus on the achievement of culturally competent practice at all levels and are infused and integrated throughout all areas of practice. In this document, definitions specified in the NASW Code of Ethics will apply throughout, as follows:

Areas of Practice: “These activities may be in the form of direct practice, community organizing, supervision, consultation, administration, advocacy, social and political action, policy development and implementation, education, and research and evaluation.” (*NASW Code of Ethics* (1999), p. 1).

Clients: “‘Clients’ is used inclusively to refer to individuals, families, groups, organizations, and communities.” (*NASW Code of Ethics* (1999), p. 1).

***Standard 1: Ethics and Values***

*Social workers shall function in accordance with the values, ethics, and standards of the profession, recognizing how personal and professional values may conflict with or accommodate the needs of diverse populations.*

Culturally competent social workers will demonstrate:

1. Knowledge of the NASW Code of Ethics.
  2. Ability to describe areas of conflict and accommodation between personal values, professional values and that of other cultures.
  3. Ability to recognize the convergence and disparity between the values of the dominant society and the values of the historically oppressed under-represented and underserved populations.
  4. Appreciation and respect of differences and strengths in culture.
  5. Awareness of the dilemmas they may encounter when they recognize the needs of diverse clients in domains such as:
    - Boundaries
    - Norms of behavior
    - Advocacy
    - Controversial Issues (i.e. abortion, gay, lesbian)
    - Dual relations
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***Standard 2: Self Awareness***

*Social Workers shall develop an understanding of their own personal and cultural values and beliefs as a first step in appreciating the importance of multicultural identities in the lives of people.*

Culturally competent social workers will:

1. Examine and describe their cultural background and identities to increase awareness of assumptions, values, beliefs and biases and determine how these impact services and influence relationship with clients.
  2. Identify how ignorance, fears, and “isms” (within the multicultural spectrum such as racism, sexism, ethnocentrism, heterosexualism, ageism, classism) or other factors such as homophobia, and religious background have influenced their attitudes, beliefs, and feelings.
  3. Demonstrate an awareness of personal or professional limitations that may warrant the referral of a client or organization to another resource that can better meet their needs.
  4. Demonstrate increased comfort with self- and other-awareness about cultural customs and views of the world.
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***Standard 3: Cross-Cultural Knowledge***

*Social workers shall have and continue to develop knowledge and understanding about the history, traditions, values, family systems and artistic expressions of major client groups served.*

Culturally competent social workers will:

1. Expand their cultural knowledge and expertise by studying:
  - a. The help-seeking behaviors of diverse client groups
  - b. The historical context of diverse communities
  - c. The role of language, speech patterns and communication styles of diverse client groups
  - d. The impact of social service policies on diverse groups served
  - e. The resources such as agencies, people, informal helping networks and research that can be mobilized on behalf of diverse clients
2. Possess specific knowledge about the client groups which they serve, and about the traditional and non-traditional providers they use including:
  - a. Historical experiences, resettlement patterns, individual and group oppression, adjustment styles, socioeconomic backgrounds, life processes,
  - b. Learning styles, cognitive skills, world-views, and specific cultural concerns and practices
  - c. Their definitions of and beliefs about the causation of wellness and illness or normality and abnormality; and how care and services should be delivered.
3. Demonstrate knowledge of the power relationships in the community and institutions, and how these impact diverse groups.
4. Possess specific knowledge about US, global, social, cultural, and political systems, and how they operate and how they serve or fail to serve client groups. These groups include institutional, class, culture, and language barriers to service.
5. Identify the limitations and strengths of current theories, practice models, and select which have applicability and relevance to the diverse groups with which they work.
6. Transfer awareness of personal heritage to becoming culturally aware of the culture and heritage of others.
7. Describe how privilege is manifested by people within different dominant groups
8. Describe the effects that dominant and non-dominant status plays in the workplace regarding interpersonal relations and group dynamics
9. Distinguish between intentional and unintentional assertion of privilege and manifestation of institutionalization of “isms”.

10. Describe how group membership in the context of world-view is associated with patterns of privilege and internalized oppression
  11. Understand the interaction of the cultural systems of the social worker, client, the particular setting, and the broader immediate community.
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***Standard 4. Cross Cultural Skills***

*Social workers shall use appropriate methodological approaches, skills, and techniques that reflect the workers' understanding of the role of culture in the helping process.*

Culturally competent social workers will:

1. Engage a wide range of persons who are culturally different or similar to themselves
  2. Display proficiency in discussing cultural difference, and helping clients to be comfortable with these discussions.
  3. Conduct a comprehensive assessment of clients in which cultural norms and behaviors are differentiated from problematic or symptomatic behaviors
  4. Assess cultural strengths and limitations, and their impact on individual and group functioning, integrating this understanding into intervention plans
  5. Select and develop appropriate methods, skills and techniques that are attuned to their clients' cultural, bicultural or marginal experiences in their environments
  6. Adapt and use a variety of culturally proficient models
  7. Communicate effectively with culturally and linguistically different clients through language acquisition, proper use of interpreters, verbal and nonverbal skills, and culturally appropriate protocols.
  8. Where clinically appropriate employ the clients' natural support system in resolving problems, for example, folk healers, indigenous remedies, storefronts, religious leaders, friends, family and other community residents and organizations
  9. Advocate, negotiate, and employ empowerment skills in their work with clients
  10. Consult with supervisors and colleagues for feedback and monitoring of performance, and identify features of their own professional style that impede or enhance their culturally competent practice
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***Standard 5. Service Delivery***

*Social workers shall be knowledgeable about and skillful in the use of services available in the community and broader society and be able to make appropriate referrals for their diverse clients.*

Culturally competent social workers will:

1. Identify the formal and informal resources in the community, describe their strengths and weaknesses, and facilitate referrals as indicated, tailored to the culturally relevant needs of the client.
2. Actively advocate for and cooperate with efforts to create culturally competent services and programs, including
  - a. Actively recruiting multi-ethnic staff and including cultural competence requirements in job descriptions and performance and promotion measures
  - b. Reviewing the current and emergent demographic trends for the geographic area served by the agency to determine service needs for the provision of interpretation and translation services
  - c. Creating service delivery systems or models that are more appropriate to the targeted client populations or advocating for the creation of such services
  - d. Including participation by clients as major stakeholders in the development of service delivery systems
  - e. Ensuring that program decor and design is reflective of the cultural heritage of clients and families using the service
  - f. Attending to social issues (for example, housing, education, police, and social justice) that concern clients of diverse backgrounds
  - g. Not accepting staff remarks that insult or demean clients and their culture
  - h. Supporting the inclusion of cultural competence standards in accreditation bodies and organizational policies as well as in licensing and certification examinations
  - i. Developing staffing plans that reflect the organization and the targeted client population (for example, hiring, position descriptions, performance evaluations, training)
  - j. Developing performance measures to assess culturally competent practice
  - k. Participation of client groups in the development of research and treatment protocols.
3. Culturally competent programs, organizations, and service systems build culturally competent organizations through:

- a. Effective recruitment of multilingual and multicultural staff
  - b. Staff composition reflecting the diversity of the client population
  - c. Service planning strategy that includes an assessment of the demographics and demographic trends of the service community
  - d. Expanded service capacity to improve the breadth and depth of services to a greater variety of cultural groups
  - e. Meaningful inclusion of clients representing relevant cultural groups and/or community members representing relevant cultural groups in decision-making and advisory governance entities, program planning, program evaluation, and research endeavors.
  - f. Physical plant designed and decorated in a manner that is welcoming to the diverse cultural groups served
  - g. Engagement in advocacy to improve social issues relevant to client group
  - h. A work climate, through formal and informal means, that addresses workforce diversity challenges and promotes respect for clients and colleagues of different backgrounds
  - i. Documented advocacy for culturally competent policies and procedures of accrediting, licensing, certification bodies, contracting agencies, etc.
  - j. Inclusion of cultural competency as a component of human resource management – job descriptions, performance evaluations, promotions and training, etc.
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***Standard 6. Empowerment and Advocacy***

*Social workers shall be aware of the effect of social policies and programs on diverse client populations, advocating for and with clients whenever appropriate.*

Culturally competent social workers will:

1. Advocate for public policies that honor the cultural values, norms and behaviors of diverse groups.
  2. Select appropriate intervention strategies to help colleagues, collaborating partners, and institutional representatives examine their own conscious or unconscious manifestations of an “ism”, exclusionary behaviors, or oppressive policies.
    - a. Assess level of readiness for feedback and intervention of the dominant group member
    - b. Select either education, dialogue, increased intergroup contact, social advocacy, or social action as a strategy
    - c. Participate in social advocacy and social action to better empower diverse clients and communities at the local, state, and/or national level
  3. Use practice methods and approaches that facilitate the client to connect with their own power in a manner that is appropriate for their cultural context
  4. Provide support to diverse cultural groups who are advocating on their own behalf
  5. Avoid imposing personal values during empowerment work with clients.
  6. Demonstrate intentional effort to assure that they do not to impose their own personal values in practice.
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***Standard 7. Diverse Workforce***

*Social workers shall support and advocate for recruitment, admissions and hiring, and retention efforts in social work programs and agencies that ensure diversity within the profession.*

Culturally competent social workers will:

1. Advocate for and support human resource policies and procedures that ensure diversity and inclusion within their organization.
2. Work to achieve a workforce and organization that reflects the demographics of the population served throughout all levels of the organization.
3. Advocate for and support policies that assure equity and appropriate compensations for social workers who bring special skill or knowledge to the profession, such as bicultural and bilingual skills or American Sign Language skills.
4. Advocate for and support recruitment and retention strategies to social work programs and schools of social work that increase the diversity within the profession.
5. Promote and maintain the expectation that all staff regardless of cultural membership continuously engage in the process of improving cultural proficiency and capacity to serve a variety of populations.

Culturally competent organizations will:

1. Have in place human resource and other organizational policies and procedures that support staff diversity
2. Regularly monitor the extent to which their management and staff composition reflect the diversity of the client population.
3. Take corrective action as appropriate and refocus recruitment efforts. Review their selection policies for inadvertent exclusion of the underrepresented, underserved, and oppressed cultural group.
4. Regularly monitor and take remedial action as needed to ensure that client groups may receive services in their native language.
  - a. Actively recruit and seek to retain multilingual staff
  - b. Provide “second language” courses to existing staff
  - c. Provide appropriate compensations for social workers who bring special language skill or knowledge to the profession, such as bicultural and bilingual skills or American Sign Language skills.
5. Include cultural competency as a requirement for job performance, by including these requirements in job descriptions, performance evaluations, promotions, and training.

6. Foster a work climate, through formal and informal means, that addresses workforce diversity challenges and promotes respect for clients and colleagues of different backgrounds.
  7. Establish cultural norms of openness and respect for discussing situations in which insensitive or exclusionary behaviors were experienced.
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***Standard 8: Professional Education***

*Social workers shall advocate for and participate in educational and training programs that help advance cultural competence within the profession.*

Culturally competent social workers will:

1. Promote professional education programs that advance cultural competency within the profession.
2. Advocate the infusion and integration of cultural competency standards in social work curricula and research in the BSW, MSW, and Ph.D. levels.
3. Conduct research that adds to cultural competency knowledge
4. Advocate state-of-the art professional education on diversity and work with diverse populations.
5. Train staff in cross-cultural communication, culturally diverse customs, and techniques for resolving racial, ethnic or cultural conflicts between staff and the clients served.

Culturally competent organizations will:

1. Provide ongoing training and support for improving cultural competency skills to all employees, including top management, middle management, front line supervisors, front-line staff, and administrative/custodial staff.
  2. Resolve racial, ethnic or cultural conflicts between staff and the clients served and among employees within the organization itself.
  3. Conduct evaluation research to determine their effectiveness in serving or interacting with client groups from different populations.
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***Standard 9: Language Diversity***

*Social workers shall seek to provide and advocate for the provision of information, referrals, and services in the language appropriate to the client, which may include the use of interpreters.*

Culturally competent social workers will:

1. Demonstrate an understanding that language is part of the total identity of a client.
  2. Advocate for rights of individuals and groups to receive resources in their own language.
  3. Provide and advocate for information, referrals, and services in appropriate language for the client.
  4. Provide jargon-free print materials in easy to read, low literacy, and picture and symbol formats for individuals with limited English proficiency
  5. Advocate for the preservation and appreciation of language diversity among clients.
  6. Advocate for reasonable accommodations of the client's language needs, including the provision of professional sign language interpreters and translators.
  7. Improve their own linguistic proficiency.
  8. Understand that words and phrases, especially those translated from one language to another, or one region of the country to another, may have different meanings, and check to ensure accurate communications when working with client groups.
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***Standard 10: Cross-Cultural Leadership***

*Social workers shall be able to communicate information about diverse client groups to other professionals.*

Culturally competent social workers will:

1. Take leadership roles within the profession to promote cultural competence within the profession.
  2. Take leadership roles in communicating and disseminating information on cultural competency and diverse clients to other professionals through activities such as serving on committees, making presentations writing articles, developing guidelines, and conducting research.
  3. Take leadership roles in empowering diverse clients to assume advocacy roles within own organization and in the community
  4. Advocate fair and equitable treatment for diverse groups in and outside of profession.
  5. Create a proactive process that empowers individuals, families, groups, organizations, and communities.
  6. Establish strategies for people and organizations within the profession to share information and learning with one another on how to engage in culturally competent behavior and promote culturally competent practices and policies.
  7. Model culturally competent behavior in their interactions with client groups, other professionals, and each other.
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