Organizational Integration of Cultural Competency: Building Organizational Capacity to Improve Service Delivery to Culturally Diverse Populations

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“Engage others in the dialogue about the need to be intentional in addressing racial/ethnic/ gender/sexual orientation disparities” (Annie E. Casey Foundation, 2009).

In 2001, NASW published the NASW Standards for Cultural Competence in Social Work Practice, a widely used resource by practicing social workers in their work with increasingly diverse ethnic and racial client populations. The standards clarify that cultural competence not only addresses the traditional areas of race and ethnicity, but also includes socioeconomic and cultural differences of class, gender, sexual orientation, age, and religious beliefs. To complement these standards, in 2007, NASW published Indicators for the Achievement of the NASW Standards for Cultural Competence in Social Work Practice. This document provides additional guidance and interpretation for the sustainability, advancement, and implementation of culturally competent social work practice in organizations, agencies, and the communities.

Demographic Shifts in the U.S. Population
By 2050, the U.S. population is anticipated to increase to 394 million and experience a significant demographic shift, whereby 54 percent of the population will be composed of minorities (U.S. Census Bureau, 2010). Moreover, the aging minority population is projected to triple by 2030 (U.S. Census Bureau, 2010). These significant demographic changes highlight the need for social workers to reinforce their commitment toward meeting the challenge of delivering culturally appropriate interventions and responding to individual and family needs across the life span.

Understanding and providing cultural competence services is critical for organizations seeking to address the needs of the diverse populations they serve. Systematically supporting and incorporating cultural competence into organizations requires persistence and full engagement at all levels of operations, including leadership, policies, programs, practices, and services. Although
Organizational leaders also have a responsibility to create mechanisms that enable attitudes, behaviors, policies, and leadership to foster effective cross-cultural work (National Center for Cultural Competency [NCCC] (a), 2012).

The Importance of Culture

WHAT IS CULTURE?
Culture is “an integrated pattern of human behavior that includes thoughts, communications, languages, practices, beliefs, values, customs, courtesies, rituals, manners of interacting, roles, relationships, and expected behaviors of racial, ethnic, religious, or social group and the ability to transmit the above to succeeding generations” (National Center for Cultural Competency 2012, 1, p. 1).

WHAT IS CULTURAL COMPETENCE?
“Cultural competence is a set of congruent behaviors, attitudes, and policies that come together in a system or agency or among professionals and enable the system, agency, or professionals to work effectively in cross-cultural situations” (NASW, 2007, p. 13).

“Cultural competence is also the integration and transformation of knowledge about individuals and groups of people into specific standards, policies, practices, and attitudes used in appropriate cultural settings to increase the quality of services, thereby producing better outcomes” (NASW, 2007, p. 13).

WHY DOES CULTURE MATTER?
Cultural experiences define how people receive information and how they make choices. Organizations also have a responsibility to create mechanisms that enable attitudes, behaviors, policies, and leadership to foster effective cross-cultural work (National Center for Cultural Competency [NCCC] (a), 2012). To meet the essential elements of cultural competence, organizations need to have the capacity to value diversity, conduct cultural self-assessment; identify cross-cultural dynamics; institutionalize cultural knowledge; and adapt service delivery in cultural contexts of the individuals, families, and communities they serve. Integration of these principles into the organizational structure and operations is reflected in all aspects of policy making, administration, management, practice, and service delivery (NCCC (a), 2012).

Essential Elements for Building Organizational Capacity for Culturally Competent Practice

VALUE DIVERSITY
The atmosphere created in an organization is one that supports trust, respects differences, person centered, and fosters opportunity and structure to express and discuss culturally based values, perceptions, and experiences (Cross, Bazron, Dennis, & Isaacs, 1989).

CONDUCT CULTURAL SELF-ASSESSMENT
The profession encourages social workers to examine and develop understanding and self-awareness of their personal and cultural values and beliefs (NASW, 2007). As part of the organization’s assessment, the institution needs to engage clients, families, and the community. Components of the assessment include workforce recruitment; hiring practices and policies that indicate commitment to a diverse staff, volunteers and governing representation; an evaluation of the degree to which cultural competency is integral to the mission, structure, and operations, and the level of integration of cultural competency into policies, planning, goals, objectives, evaluation measures, and quality improvement (NCCC, 2011a).

IDENTIFY CROSS-CULTURAL DYNAMICS
When providers and organizations lack knowledge and understanding about the culture and political differences of the people and communities they are serving, including their history, traditions, values, and family systems, they minimize the optimal delivery of program services. Cultural shifts for organizations and staff require trust, partnership, and collaboration. Barriers to services, such as language and communication, should be addressed and eliminated. Organizations should provide written and audio/visual materials and information at literacy levels of the populations served. In addition, staff should participate in cultural competency training (NCCC, 2012a).

INSTITUTIONALIZE CULTURAL KNOWLEDGE
Institutions need to provide programs for staff to increase the level of knowledge and skills to provide culturally competent practice. In addition to the integration of cultural competency into policies and procedures, organizations need financial allocations that support staff development, training, and growth. A commitment to cultural competency can also be institutionalized through staff performance expectations (NCCC, 2012a).

ADAPT SERVICE DELIVERY
Organizations should customize the programs and services they provide to the populations they serve, while considering the complexities related to delivering constructive cross-cultural communication and practice. Staff should recognize the role of cultural factors to how clients receive information and how they make choices. Organizations should ensure the availability of language services and professional staff who are linguistically and ethnically representative. In addition, organizations can evaluate their adaptation by routinely reviewing services, maintaining client demographic data, conducting client and community satisfaction surveys, and seeking input from minority-serving organizations regarding community needs. They can also support the development and implementation of innovative and culturally appropriate services that are informed by research (NCCC, 2012a).

Meeting the Challenge of Serving Diverse Populations
Culturally competent social work practice cannot occur in isolation (NASW, 2012). It requires an organizational infrastructure that supports staff in their efforts to provide culturally appropriate services (NASW, 2012). Movement toward cultural competency within organizations is often dependent on the development of a mission-driven framework that guides leadership in the development of inclusive policies and procedures. Organizational leaders also have a responsibility to create mechanisms that enable attitudes, behaviors, policies, and leadership to foster effective cross-cultural work (National Center for Cultural Competency [NCCC] (a), 2012).
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To create more culturally competent organizations, it takes visionary, committed, and persistent leaders and advocates who champion equity, diversity, and inclusion factors throughout the institution. When organizations adopt and integrate culture competency principles into their mission, policies, practices, and overall operations, they strive to create an environment that supports engagement, participation, and involvement of leaders, staff, consumers, and the community to evaluate and make available acceptable, effective, culturally appropriate services.

References

Resources
National Center for Cultural Competency. (2012). The cultural and linguistic competence family organization assessment. Available at www.gucchdgeorgetown.net/nccc/efoa
U.S. Department Health and Human Services, Office of Minority Health. The CLAS standards are primarily directed at health care organizations; however, individual providers are also encouraged to use the standards to make their practices more culturally and linguistically accessible. The principles and activities of culturally and linguistically appropriate services should be integrated throughout an organization and undertaken in partnership with the communities being served: www.thinkculturalhealth.hhs.gov/
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  - Social Work Salaries by Race/Ethnicity
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  - Social Workers in Mental Health Clinics & Outpatient Facilities
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  - Engaging Young People in Their Transition Planning
  - Healthy People 2020: Social Work Values in a Public Health Roadmap
  - Opting Out of Medicare as a Clinical Social Worker
  - Results of 2010 Psychotherapy Survey

- New Practice Standards
  - For a complete list of practice standards, visit www.socialworkers.org/practice/default.asp
  - NASW Standards for Social Work Practice with Family Caregivers of Older Adults (2010)

- Leadership Ladder: Steps to a Great Career in Social Work

- Available at http://careers.socialworkers.org/professionaldev/default.asp

- From the Front Line to the Corner Office
- Letting Your Voice be Heard
- Managing Stress
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- The Tech-Savvy Social Worker: Prepared for the Challenges of 21st Century Practice
- The Value of Dual Degrees

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