

**“CULTURAL COMPETENCY: AN APPROACH FOR  
DEVELOPING A PUBLIC AGENCY SERVICE ETHOS  
OF COMMUNITY SPIRIT IN PUBLIC SERVICES  
PROGRAMMING AND PUBLIC SERVICES DELIVERY”**

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**CHANGING DEMOGRAPHICS AND THE NEED FOR  
CULTURAL COMPETENCY IN PUBLIC SERVICES  
PROGRAMMING/PUBLIC SERVICES DELIVERY**

As the numbers of Spanish speaking immigrant persons requiring public services programming and public services delivery increases, so does the need for culturally appropriate and culturally effective public programs and public services. A public service delivery encounter between a client with this kind of background and a public service provider will involve an exchange in which different languages are spoken as well as differences in cultural beliefs, practices, and behaviors. .

## CULTURAL COMPETENCY APPROACHES

- One approach has been the call for public service providers to practice cultural competency and cultural proficiency in their interactions with clients (Weaver, 2005; Kelley and et al, 2006; Rice, 2007).
- Another approach has recommended adapting public programs and public services to the culture of the populations being targeted so that the programs and services are not only culturally accessible and but also culturally appropriate and culturally effective (Gorman, 1996; Malley-Morrison and Hines, 2004).

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## RELATED TERMS

- **ETHNIC COMPETENCE**----- “a set of procedures and activities to be used in acquiring culturally relevant insights into the problems of minority clients and the means of applying such insights to the development of intervention strategies that are culturally appropriate” (Gallegos, 1982)
- **CULTURAL HUMILITY**----- the process of equalizing the power imbalances that exist in the dynamics of service provider-client relations  
(Tervalon and Garcia, 1998)

Gallegos, 1982– Color in White Society

Tervalon and Murray-Garcia, 1998, Journal of Health Care for the Poor and Underserved

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## CULTURAL COMPETENCY ESSENTIAL ELEMENTS

Cultural competency advocates have identified five essential elements that contribute to a service delivery system's ability to become more culturally competent. The service delivery system should:

- Value diversity,
- Have the capacity for cultural self—assessment,
- Be conscious of the "dynamics" inherent when cultures interact,
- Institutionalize cultural knowledge, and
- Develop adaptations to service delivery reflecting an understanding of diversity between and within cultures. (Cross et al, 1989).

Cross et al, Toward A Culturally Competent System of Care

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## **Implementing Cultural Competency in Public Services Programming and Public Services Delivery**

Involves:

- matching intervention materials, programs, treatment, and messages to observable characteristics of a target population.
- the use of people, places, and language familiar to and preferred by the target population.
- culturally appropriate media (e.g., radio, TV, posters) and locations (e.g., churches, clinics, schools, centers).

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## **INSTITUTIONALIZING A CULTURALLY COMPETENT PUBLIC SERVICES PROGRAMMING ADMINISTRATION AND PUBLIC SERVICES DELIVERY SYSTEM?**

Institutionalized cultural knowledge can enhance an a public agency ability to serve diverse populations (Lindsey, et al., 2003).

Institutionalization means that knowledge is formally recognized, documented, and shared in interactive ways with all public service delivery personnel and explicit mechanisms and policies are in place that provide for maintaining and expanding upon the professional knowledge base about culture, so that the public agency is truly a learning organization.

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## **Cultural Competency Glossary**

- **Cultural Audit** “examines a public organization’s values, symbols, rules, and routines which maintain its purpose and existence to uncover counterproductive activities and barriers that may adversely impart its public service mission and service delivery process (Rice, 205:77)
- **Cultural competence** is "a set of congruent behaviors, attitudes, and policies that come together in a system, agency, or among professionals and enables that system, agency, or those professionals to work effectively in cross-cultural situations" (Cross et al., 1989).

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## Cultural Competency Glossary

- **Cultural discomfort** is when programs and services are not compatible with the beliefs, values, and attitudes of an individual or group.
- **Cultural discontinuity** is when programs or services are not clear or are ambiguous to the individual or group.
- **Cross-cultural education** can be divided into three conceptual approaches focusing on attitudes (cultural sensitivity/ awareness approach), knowledge (multicultural/ categorical approach), and skills (cross-cultural approach), and has been taught using a variety of interactive and experiential methodologies" (IOM, 2002).
- **Culturally and linguistically appropriate services (CLAS)** are "health care services that are respectful of and responsive to cultural and linguistic needs" (DHHS, OMH, National Standards for CLAS, 2001).

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## Cultural Competency Glossary

- **Cultural sensitivity** is "the ability to be appropriately responsive to the attitudes, feelings, or circumstances of groups of people that share a common and distinctive racial, national, religious, linguistic or cultural heritage" (DHHS, OMH, 2001, 2002; National Standards for CLAS, 2001).
- **Cultural specific programs**-is when a activities are integrated to correspond to the target group's value system and beliefs.
- **Cultural proficiency** is "when providers and systems seek to do more than provide unbiased care as they value the positive role culture can play in a person's health and well-being" (National Alliance for Hispanic Health, 2001).

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**Examples at the Federal and State Governments  
Levels in Promoting Cultural Competency in  
Public Administration and Public Service Delivery**

The Office of Minority Health, in the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services in December 2000, issued Culturally and Linguistically Appropriate Standards (CLAS) for health care organizations that receive federal funds.

**MOVING TOWARDS A CULTURALLY  
COMPETENT PUBLIC AGENCY**

**·PUBLIC AGENCY COMMUNICATIONS**

- Barriers in communication with culturally diverse people identified and removed.
- A list of culturally diverse media developed and used.
- Availability of interpreters and translators.
- Availability of resource materials relating to cultural competency.
- Inclusion of culturally diverse writers/ artists' work in agency publications.

**·PUBLIC AGENCY MARKETING AND COMMUNITY RELATIONS**

- Acknowledgement of cultural diversity in the community.
- Collaborations with culturally diverse individuals, groups, and organizations.
- Utilization of cultural expertise among community leaders.
- Participation in community network to advocate and advance cultural competency.
- Roles/services understood and respected in the community.

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## **TYPES OF CULTURAL COMPETENCE INTERVENTIONS**

1. “Clinical cultural competence” interventions are efforts to enhance an agency’s knowledge of the socio-cultural background of diverse clientele and to equip public service providers with the tools and skills to serve diverse clientele.
2. “Organizational cultural competence” efforts focus on ensuring that leadership and workforces are representative of the clientele served by the agency.
3. “Structural cultural competence” interventions are initiatives that focus on the structural processes of service delivery including interpreter/language services and agency literature.

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## **MOVING TOWARDS A CULTURALLY COMPETENT PUBLIC AGENCY**

### **• PUBLIC AGENCY PERSONNEL PRACTICES**

- Employment opportunities advertised in ethno-cultural media.
- Active recruitment of qualified culturally diverse staff/ volunteers.
- Cross-cultural skills are requisite criteria for selection and performance review .
- Meaningful participation of culturally diverse people at all levels of the organization.
- Cultural competency training formal staff and volunteers .
- Racial, ethnic, religious and linguistic composition of the community reflected in staff and volunteers.

### **• PUBLIC AGENCY POLICY & DECISION MAKING**

- Input from all staff and volunteers in decision making.
- Culturally diverse people in the community consulted to identify key diversity issues.
- Cultural competency incorporated into all policies.
- Allocation of adequate resources to implement cultural competency policies.
- Culturally diverse communities consulted before finalizing policies that may have cultural impacts.

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## **MOVING TOWARDS A CULTURALLY COMPETENT PUBLIC AGENCY**

- **PUBLIC SERVICE DELIVERY**
- Barriers preventing culturally diverse people from having access to services identified and removed.
- Outreach strategies to ensure participation from culturally diverse people.
- Culturally appropriate methods of service delivery are implemented.
- Culturally diverse communities consulted to identify needs and develop program goals, objectives, and activities.
- Cultural diversity added in all aspects of service delivery including assessment, planning, intervention, and evaluation
- Availability of support services (i.e.: E.S.L, interpretation).

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## **MOVING TOWARDS A CULTURALLY COMPETENT PUBLIC AGENCY**

- **PUBLIC AGENCY ORGANIZATIONAL CULTURE**
- Respect for the right of an individual to his/her cultural customs, beliefs and practices
- Recognition of an individual's culture as an integral part of his/her well-being
- Incorporation of language, race, ethnicity, customs, family structures and community dynamics in developing management and service delivery strategies .
- Openness and acceptance of differences.
- **PUBLIC AGENCY ADMINISTRATION**
- Diversity management knowledge and skills as requisite requirements for all leadership positions.
- All leadership positions are held responsible for providing support and guidance to all staff in implementing the mission statement and goals relate to cultural competency.
- Collecting demographic data relating to cultural diversity in the community and among clients.

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**SOME CONCLUDING OBSERVATIONS ON  
PROMOTING CULTURAL COMPETENCY IN PUBLIC  
SERVICES PROGRAMMING AND PUBLIC SERVICES  
DELIVERY**

1. An iterative process at all levels of the agency (between the clients and program directors, between agency staff, and between the program directors and their supervisors) is needed for a public agency to achieve cultural competency.

2. In particular public agency philosophies that do not understand an "ethos of community spirit" (Wandersman, 2003) will have a hard time understanding what appears to be a lack of efficiency, the inappropriate participation of non-targeted population, and the misuse of their scarce resources.

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**SOME CONCLUDING OBSERVATIONS ON  
PROMOTING CULTURAL COMPETENCY IN PUBLIC  
SERVICES PROGRAMMING AND PUBLIC SERVICES  
DELIVERY**

- Three questions that a public agency trying to achieve organizational cultural competency might ask itself are:
  - How can agencies conventionally understand that their outcome objectives as individual development change to see the importance and success of their program in larger community-based terms?
  - How can agencies change their organizational structure and assumptions to allow for a process that promotes the ideas from public service delivery personnel who were hired to develop programs for unique target populations to be expressed and impact on program design and the philosophy of the organization?
  - What practices do agencies have in place to learn about the worldview and expectations of their target populations?

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