

Connect with your Cultural Communities: A guide to domestic violence service agencies in their communities

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Strategy: Community Cultural Assessment

To this point in the GUIDE, we have focused largely on the organizational structure, values, policies, practices, and behaviors of people attached to your agency, such as board members, management, paid staff, and volunteers.

We have not yet addressed the various cultural communities in the service population of your agency, those who are intended to benefit from your agency becoming more culturally competent. And we not addressed the desired *interaction* between your agency's personnel, practices, and culture and the cultural communities; it is one thing to know that the cultural communities exist and another how to engage them.

1. Compare the Organization to the Community

A useful way to start is to look at your agency as if it contained one or more cultural communities (as in many ways it must). What are the characteristics of this (or these) community(ies)? And how do these communities resemble or not resemble the overall service population and the cultural communities within it? Are there natural linkages or barriers between these cultural communities.

We have designed a useful shorthand table for you to conduct these comparisons within your agency and among your agency, the client population it actually serves, and the cultural communities within the overall service population. By service population, we mean all of the people within the geographic or other practical boundaries that your agency has indicated it intends to serve. For some agencies, these will be county boundaries; for others, it may mean those persons referred by law enforcement or health care institutions.

It will be relatively easy for you to complete the table for staff, advocates, and board because you can both access agency files and ask people directly. It may be more difficult to describe your *clients*, depending on the kinds of relationships you have with them; if they are mainly crisis line clients, you may know far less about them than if they are receiving therapy services from your agency.

Without a doubt, it will be more difficult for many agencies to describe the cultural communities within the service population, because that requires inquiry among service agencies, among agencies that maintain local demographic data, and among the communities themselves. The balance of this section is devoted to how to conduct this kind of inquiry.

2. Use of the Comparison Table

But before we get to that, let us discuss the use of the table. The table is just another way of drawing a picture of differences and similarities within your agency and between your agency and the communities it serves. For example, is there a cultural issue *inside* your agency if the board is all college-educated and the staff is not? If the staff and the volunteers are all Euro-American, middle income women? If all the staff and volunteers are Christian? Similarly, is there a cultural issue *for* your agency if the staff and volunteers are all Euro-American but one-half of the service population is Hispanic? Or if all of the staff is heterosexual, but there is a sizeable number of gays or lesbians in the client population? Or if the staff is all college-educated and the clients or potential clients have attended only high school? These are important issues if you consider that for some (even many) staff, clients, or potential clients, having people working with them who *are* like them in some important ways is the first step in building acceptance and trust.

Looking at how you completed this table, what strikes you as important? Is it that you do not have enough information to complete the table for significant cultural communities? Or that there are profound differences between the staff and the service population? Or something else? All of these issues are worthy of your attention and effort.

The goal in filling out the table was not to fill out the table. That is just an exercise. The goal was to have you indicate to yourself what you did not know about the communities out there that you want and need to know.

So, the next step is not to complete the table, but to develop a plan to begin to fill in your gaps in knowledge of and connection to these communities.

3. Develop a Plan

[balance of guide available on request]