

ASSESSMENT GUIDELINES FOR  
**CULTURALLY RESPONSIVE**  
ORGANIZATIONS OR PROGRAMS

Adapted from the Connecticut Department of Mental Health and Addiction Services Office of Multicultural Affairs, 2000 and Cultural Competence Agency Self-Assessment Instrument Child Welfare League of America, 2002





# ASSESSMENT GUIDELINES FOR CULTURALLY RESPONSIVE ORGANIZATIONS OR PROGRAMS

## Introduction

Catholic Charities USA member agencies serve widely diverse populations, each with unique experiences and needs.

According to the U.S. Census Bureau, America is more racially and ethnically diverse than at any time in its history. Changes in the cultural makeup of communities are challenging and long-standing. Shifts in racial/ethnic diversity are not just about numbers, but also about the impact of multiple cultures and ethnicities on the services we provide.

The development of culturally responsive services is a major goal for numerous organizations. The Council on Accreditation (COA) defines cultural competence as the degree to which an organization modifies or tailors the system of service delivery to the ethnic, racial, cultural, religious, and national diversity in its service population. For example, GOV 2.02 requires that the organization's governing board reflect the demographics of the community it serves; HR 2.02 requires the composition of the organization's workforce to reflect the demographics of the community it serves; Client Rights (CR) require that organizations accommodate the written and oral communication needs of their clients; and RTX 3.04 require culturally responsive assessments. COA assesses an organization's implementation of these standards by reviewing policies, procedures, and case records and conducting client and personnel interviews during on-site visits. Such tailoring includes personnel selection/human resource management; training and development; assessment; service planning and implementation; and program evaluation and consumer care monitoring.

Why is culture important? First, culture shapes personal and group values and attitudes, including perceptions about what works and what doesn't work, and what makes sense to a given community and what doesn't. We all have a distinct cultural background that has helped define us as individuals and as members of our respective communities. Understanding a group's culture helps agency professionals understand how members of that group view their environment and their role in it.

Second, by understanding culture, service providers are better equipped to avoid stereotypes and biases that can contribute to the disparate treatment of specific cultural and ethnic groups in the service system. Understanding and respecting culture promotes a focus on the positive characteristics of a particular group, and reflects an appreciation of cultural differences. Finally, culture plays a central role in the development and design of appropriate health and human service delivery programs (U.S. Administration on Aging, 2001).

Culture is much broader than race and ethnicity. Race and ethnicity are commonly thought to be dominant elements of culture, but these general categories fail to identify the substantial variances that are found within the different racial and ethnic groups. The larger group may only share common physical characteristics, language, or faith. We often fail to consider other distinct factors that influence the culture of communities within the larger categories of race and ethnicity, such as age, disability, education, gender, geographic location, history, etc.

This means that in order for a plan to be acceptable, it must address the needs and experience that a client has with your agency and be based, in part or in whole, on the following:

1. Demographics of the community of people where your services are located;
2. The agency's capacity to meet the needs of the community they serve;
3. Agency policies, procedures and governance;
4. Whether the linguistic, and cultural needs and accommodations and accessibility are considered in the services your agency provides; and
5. Human Resources issues such as hiring, training and staff development.

Providing services that are culturally responsive is an essential component in effective service delivery. The following guidelines provide usable examples to assess the current status of culturally responsive services in your agency. This is an instrument that can be used each year to assess the work being done with regards to cultural competency and where it needs to expand in order to become more culturally responsive. The results of the assessment can serve as a baseline

for developing a strategy that addresses the needs of each client and how your agency will implement strategies for incorporating cultural competence into service delivery and program development.

Attaining cultural competency is a process in which knowledge about individuals and their communities is translated and integrated into specific practices and policies applied in culturally appropriate settings. The cultural competence assessment guidelines that follow can help agencies design effective responses to cultural and ethnic concerns and needs. The elements presented here reflect guidelines being developed by organizations nationwide, as well as by accrediting and licensing bodies.

**The results of your self-assessment can be used in the development of plans and strategies to increase the cultural competency of services delivered by your agency.**

# CULTURALLY RESPONSIVE SERVICE SYSTEM ASSESSMENT GUIDE

## Instructions

Rate your organization on each item in Sections I through VIII using the following scale:



Not at all

To a moderate degree

To a great degree

Suggested Rating Interpretations:

#1 and #2: “Priority Concerns” - #3: “Needs Improvement” - #4 and #5: “Adequate”

When you have rated all items and assessed each section, please follow the instructions on page 9 in order to make an assessment of your program or agency and to formulate a culturally responsive plan that addresses the needs you feel are priorities.

## I. AGENCY DEMOGRAPHIC DATA (ASSESSMENT)

**A culturally responsive agency uses basic demographic information to assess and determine the cultural and linguistic needs of the service area.**

Have you identified the demographic composition of the program’s service area (from recent census data, local planning documents, statement of need, etc.) which should include ethnicity, race, and primary language spoken, as reported by the persons served?

Have you identified the staff composition (ethnicity, race, language capabilities) in relation to the demographic composition of your service area?

Have you compared the demographic composition of the staff with the client demographics?

Have you identified the demographic composition of the persons served?

## II. POLICIES, PROCEDURES AND GOVERNANCE

A culturally responsive agency has a board of directors or other group (such as a cultural competency committee of board subcommittee of diversity) that is responsible for policies that reflect a respect for and responsiveness to the service needs of culturally diverse communities.

Has your organization appointed executives, managers and administrators who take responsibility for, and have authority over, the development, implementation, and monitoring of a plan for culturally responsive service delivery?

Has your organization's director appointed a standing committee or other body to advise management on matters pertaining to culturally responsive services?

Do your organization's values and/or mission statement reflect a commitment to inclusiveness and cultural responsiveness?

Do your internal policies reflect compliance with all federal, state, and local equal employment opportunity laws?

Does your organization have culturally appropriate policies and procedures communicated orally and/or written in the principle language of the client/consumer to address confidentiality, individual patient rights and grievance procedures, fact sheets, legal assistance, etc. as needed and appropriately?

## III. SERVICES/PROGRAMS

A culturally responsive agency offers services that are culturally responsive and in languages that ensure client/consumer comprehension.

### Linguistic Support

Has the agency arranged to provide materials and services in the language(s) of limited English-speaking clients/consumer (e.g., bilingual staff, in-house interpreters, or a contract with outside interpreter agency and/or telephone interpreters?

Do intake records indicate the preferred language of service recipients?

Is there a protocol to handle client/consumer/family complaints in languages other than English?  
Are the forms that client/consumers sign in their preferred language?

Are the persons answering the telephones, during and after-hours, able to communicate in the language of the speakers?

Does the organization provide information about programs, policies, covered services and procedures for accessing and utilizing services in the primary language(s) of client/consumers and families?

Does the organization have signs regarding language assistance posted at key locations?

Are cultural and linguistic supports available for clients/consumers throughout different service offerings along the service continuum?

### **B** Cultural Assessments

Is the client/consumer's culture/ethnicity taken into account when formulating an assessment or course for care?

Is the client/consumer's level of acculturation identified, described and incorporated as part of a cultural assessment?

Are culturally relevant assessment tools utilized to augment the assessment?

### **C** Cultural Community Accommodations

Are culturally appropriate, educative approaches such as films, slide presentations or video tapes utilized for preparation and orientation of client/consumers to your program?

Has the organization identified community resources (community councils, ethnic/cultural social entities, spiritual leaders, faith communities, voluntary associations, etc.), that can exchange information and services with staff, client/consumers, and family members?

Are the agency's outreach, information, and preventative care services designed to meet the needs of culturally and ethnically diverse communities?

Does your program incorporate aspects of each client/consumer's ethnic/cultural heritage into the design of services?

### **D** Program Accessibility

Do persons from different cultural and linguistic backgrounds have timely and convenient access to your services?

Do your programs provide needed supports to families of clients/consumers, i.e. meeting rooms for extended families, child support, drop-in services, etc.?

Are services located close to the neighborhoods where persons from different cultures and linguistic backgrounds reside?

Do you have services available during evenings and weekends?

Are your services readily accessible by public transportation?

Does the agency provide ongoing training (at least annually) to staff on cross-cultural communication, culturally diverse family customs, and culturally responsive case practice and conflict resolution within different cultural groups?

Do the agency's supervisors provide support and guidance to staff in applying their knowledge of cultural competence to decisions about service delivery?

Does the agency do its best to work with families in settings that are comfortable and familiar to them (e.g. homes, neighborhoods and community facilities)?

#### IV. CARE MANAGEMENT

Are staff who have direct contact with clients respectful of the individuals and families served by being supportive; able to recognize strengths; sensitive to the needs of individuals and families in crisis; and culturally and linguistically responsive (Council on Accreditation, 2013)?

Is the type of care for clients/consumers from different backgrounds consistently and effectively managed according to their identified cultural needs?

Does the level and length of care meet the needs of clients/consumers from different cultural backgrounds?

Is the management of the services for people from different groups compatible with their ethnic/cultural background?

#### V. CONTINUITY OF CARE/ SERVICE

A culturally responsive agency recognizes that clients might need services from multiple areas and utilizes partnerships with community resources that help the agency build capacity.

Do you have arrangements (working, financial or otherwise) for securing concrete services needed by clients/consumers (e.g., housing, income, employment, medical, dental, and other emergency personal support needs)?

Do you have integrated, planned, transitional arrangements between one service modality and another?

## VI. HUMAN RESOURCES DEVELOPMENT

A culturally responsive agency implements staff training and development in cultural competence at all levels and across all disciplines, for leadership and governing entities, as well as for management, supervisory, treatment and support staff.

Is the agency making use of other programs or organizations that specialize in serving persons with diverse cultural and linguistic backgrounds as a resource for staff education and training?

Is the agency maximizing recruitment and retention efforts for staff who reflect the cultural and linguistic diversity of populations needing services?

Have the staff's training needs in cultural competence been assessed?

Have staff attended training programs on cultural competence in the past two years?

## VII. MONITORING AND IMPROVEMENT

A culturally responsive agency has a quality monitoring and improvement program that ensures access to culturally responsive care.

Does the Quality Improvement (QI) Plan address the cultural/ethnic and language needs?

Are clients/consumers and families asked whether ethnicity/culture and language are appropriately addressed in order to receive culturally responsive services from the organization?

Does the organization maintain copies of minutes, recommendations, and accomplishments of its multicultural advisory committee?

Is there a process for continually monitoring, evaluating, and rewarding the cultural competence of staff?

## VIII. INFORMATION/MANAGEMENT SYSTEM

Does the organization monitor, survey, or otherwise access, the QI utilization patterns based on the culture/ethnicity and language?

Are client/consumer satisfaction surveys available in different languages in proportion to the demographic data?

Are there data collection systems developed and maintained to track clients/consumers by demographics, utilization and outcomes across levels of care, transfers, referrals, etc.?

# FORMULATING A CULTURALLY RESPONSIVE PLAN BASED ON THE ASSESSMENT OF YOUR PROGRAM OR AGENCY

Focus on the following critical areas of concern as you develop goals for a culturally responsive plan for your agency's service system.

**Access:** Degree to which services to persons are quickly and readily available.

**Retention:** The result of quality service that helps maintain a client in treatment with continued commitment.

**Engagement:** The skill and environment to promote a positive personal impact on the quality of the client's commitment to be in treatment.

Based on an assessment of your agency, determine whether, in your initial plan, you need to direct efforts of developing cultural competency toward one, or a combination of the above critical areas. **Then, structure your agency's cultural competence plan using the following instructions:**

1. Based on the results of this assessment, summarize and describe your organization's perceived **strengths** in providing **services to persons from different cultural groups**. Please provide specific examples and supporting documentation (e.g., data, policies, procedures, etc.).
2. Based on your assessment, summarize and describe your organization's primary areas considered either "**Priority Concerns**" (#1 and/or #2), or "**Needs Improvement**" (#3) in providing services to persons from different cultural groups.
3. Based on your organization's **strengths** and **needs, prioritize** the organizational goals and objectives addressed in your **cultural competency plan**. Describe clearly what you will do to provide services to persons who are culturally and linguistically different.
4. Using the developed goals and objectives, please describe in detail the plans, activities and/or strategies you will implement to assist your organization in meeting each of the goals and objectives indicated.

**Some things your agency might consider as a result of this assessment:**

- Provide cultural competency training as part of the orientation of all new employees;
- Provide regular (at least annual) cultural competency training for all staff;
- Have Human Resources regularly compare the demographics of clients served to those of staff and strive to match them;
- Modify intake tools to meet the cultural and linguistic needs of clients and community; and
- Create a Cultural Competency Committee

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