It is time for parents to teach young people early on that in diversity, there is beauty, and there is strength.

—Maya Angelou
Author and Civil Rights Activist

Inclusive Engagement

GOALS OF PUBLIC ENGAGEMENT

- Empower communities to make decisions for themselves
- Release the capacity and potential of communities
- Develop and strengthen relationships between service providers and communities

THREE GUIDING PRINCIPLES

1. *Enhance Relationships & Engagement*
   There is a greater likelihood of engagement from underrepresented communities when organizations take steps to enhance their relationships with those populations. Creating trusting relationships, increasing accessibility to facilities and services, and providing diverse opportunities to become involved, are key actions that reflect on organizational attitudes and values about developing equitable and sustainable engagement.

2. *Enrich Knowledge Gathering*
   Strengthening connections with communities through knowledge gathering allows those constituents to play a key role in determining relevance and appropriateness of programming. We must look beyond surveys as a means of gathering crucial data and feedback toward more personalized modes and means of this important task. In essence, exchanging information, rather than collecting it, provides an incentive for engaging in conversations and collaborations, as well as a greater sense of ownership in the outcome.

3. *Embrace Organizational Change*
   In order for community engagement to flourish, organizations (and individuals that represent those organizations) must be open to organizational changes that are responsive to community insight and allow for shared power between communities and the organizations that serve them. The process and results of increased community engagement must go beyond activities to involve more community members, but rather become a prominent organizational value that drives everyday decision-making processes.

Sustainable Engagement

Issues stemming from race and other cultural matters are broad and varied. Individuals and organizations will find that they are quite knowledgeable and proficient in some aspects of cultural competence, and yet, may neglect asking crucial questions in another area. For instance, we may be acutely aware of making focus group (or other) accommodations for the hearing impaired community, but may not have a cache of options to make public health programs accessible to non-native English speakers. When you begin to consider your approach to engagement with diverse communities, you can gauge how and why mainstream strategies have a lower effectiveness and work from a more culturally responsive foundation. Ultimately, the more your work stems from relevant aspects of racial and cultural identity, the greater your chances for effective outcomes and increased, sustainable engagement from a broader, more diverse community.

In assessing your agency/organization's capacity for cultural responsiveness, it is useful to have a tool that is focused on core ways to interpret the wide range of behaviors and attitudes that are expressed in the policies and practices of an organization. Our **Process of Gaining Cultural Competence** represents a continuum into which we can place behaviors, attitudes, policies, and practices. This is intended to be a dynamic tool, since there is always room for growth and development in individuals, organizations, and institutionalized policies and practices.

Process of Gaining *Cultural Competence*

Actively seeks knowledge about other cultures; educates others about cultural differences

Recognizes different cultures and seeks to learn about them

Sees their culture or another culture as superior to other cultures.

Culturally Competent

Culturally Incompetent

Humbly accepts, appreciates and accommodates cultural differences. Understands the effect of their own culture in relating to others.

Sees all the same people, and thinks everyone should be treated the same

Lacking Cultural Awareness. May believe there is only one way of doing things.

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Artful Communication

Before we branch out into how to facilitate a conversation, it will be helpful to understand that difficult conversations should include dialogue and stay away from becoming a debate. At the beginning of every REACH for Organizational Change session conducted by the New England MHTTC, we review the basics of what debate and dialogue are so that members of our learning collaborative understand and have this principle top-of-mind.

Below are our *Dialogue v. Debate* principles. We are providing this information so that you can use it as a tool in conversations with your leaders, peers, and stakeholders about any issue in your agency/organization.

Dialogue   *versus*   Debate

Dialogue	Debate
Is collaborative: two or more sides work together toward common understanding.	*Is oppositional: two sides oppose each other and attempt to prove each other wrong.*
Finding common ground is the goal.	*Winning is the goal.*
One listens to the other side(s) in order to understand, find meaning and agreement.	*One listens to the other side in order to find flaws and to counter its arguments.*
Enlarges and possibly changes a participant's point of view.	*Affirms a participant's own point of view.*
Reveals assumptions for re-evaluation.	*Defends assumptions as truth.*
Causes introspection on one's own position.	*Causes critique of the other position.*
Opens the possibility of reaching a better solution than any of the original solutions.	*Defends one's own positions as the best solution and excludes other solutions.*
Creates an open-minded attitude, an openness to being wrong and an openness to change.	*Creates a close-minded attitude, a determination to be right.*
One submits one's best thinking, knowing that other people's reflections will help improve it rather than destroy it.	*One submits one's best thinking and defends it against challenge to show that it is right.*

Overcoming Challenges

Racially and culturally appropriate public engagement delivers results, including:

- Better quality and more responsive services with improved outcomes

- Reduction of inequalities and greater connectedness with stakeholders

- Enhanced understanding of why and how services need to change and develop.

However, it is important to recognize the challenges of introducing and implementing this kind of public engagement campaign. For example, this level of outreach is highly dependent upon your agency/organization's ability to develop and maintain relationships—which is a time consuming process that requires a strong level of commitment from the agency/organization as well as the individual members of your change team and larger contingent of staff and stakeholders.

Keep in mind, too, it may be difficult to assess your agency/organization's capacity for cultural responsiveness and conflict will be inevitable. With a comprehensive approach to racially and culturally appropriate public engagement campaign, your change team can consider alternate or additional strategies that reflect a culturally aware, multifaceted approach toward racial equity and advancing cultural humility throughout your organization's processes and practices.

As you and your change team begin this work, consider the following guidance around inclusive engagement:

➢ You will need to practice key skills for engaging others in crucial conversations around racial equity and cultural humility.

➢ Get a head start on generating ideas for how you can use your own awareness and curiosity to overcome misunderstandings.

➢ Identify your cultural values and biases to understand how this impacts your relationships with others.

➢ Develop a deeper awareness and knowledge of a race equity growth mindset.

Six Essential Strategies

Effective community engagement takes careful planning and an acknowledgment that each population that you work with is a unique opportunity to broaden your understanding of your agency/organization's service community.

To help you think about ways to use each strategy, we have provided critical questions to consider.

STRATEGY 1: Build Personal Relationships with Racial/Ethnic Community.

Q1: Are there key individuals or constituents you already have or should be building a relationship with?

Q2: Are there venues for you to attend or explore to find out who are natural community leaders?

- Informal/Community driven gatherings that are appropriate to attend
- Connect with the individuals in this community/population

STRATEGY 2: Develop Alternative Methods for Engagement.

Q1: Do you have non-traditional methods of outreach to get people involved?

Q2: Do you offer multiple ways for contributing input and feedback?

- Provide opportunities for social interaction and relationship building.
- Provide opportunities for community members to give feedback in photographic, voice recorded, or video formats.

STRATEGY 3: Partner with Diverse Organizations and Agencies.

Q1: Are there organizations that currently have relationships with your target populations that you can connect with (remember to consider power dynamics)?

Q2: Have any agencies or organizations successfully implemented similar programs or initiatives (perhaps on a smaller scale or in another community) that you can solicit advice from?

- Connect with organizations who are already culturally tied to the target community or are currently providing services to your target population.
- Create a network of services that eliminate gaps or reduce redundancies for the target population.

Six Essential Strategies

STRATEGY 4: Maintain a Presence Within the Community.

Q1: Are there community driven events that you can participate in and that people will already be gathering for?

Q2: Do community members see you out, regularly, in the community?

- Attend community driven events and activities (think non-traditional).
- Establish places in the community that people can have sustained, informal interactions with you.

STRATEGY 5: Increase Accessibility.

Q1 Are there issues/barriers (language, location, time, transportation, childcare, food, incentives, appeal, power dynamics, etc.) that should be considered throughout the whole process?

Q2 Are there ways to increase the level of input a community has in a process?

- Selecting the most appropriate and effective communication method to promote engagement opportunities.
- Decrease barriers to attendance or effective communication at events.

STRATEGY 6: Create a Welcoming Atmosphere.

Q1 Does your process reflect, honor, and welcome the community?

Q2 Do the venues you choose invite participation and engagement?

- Hire staff or consultants from the community or that reflect the racial or ethnic population.
- Choose gathering places that are comfortable and that are conducive to the interactions that you want to have.

QUICK TIPS

Key Steps to Inclusive Public Engagement
Use our Quick Tips as you work to create trusting relationships and increase accessibility to services and resources.

What To Do	How To Do It
Define Scope of Work	**Identify the decisions to be made and determine where and how the public can influence decisions— use this to define the public's roles.** Identify racial and ethnic populations affected by the process or project. Does your process or project impact racial disparity, institutional racism, etc.?
Define Roles	**Define roles for the public, your agency, organization, and other stakeholders.** Who else in your department is involved? How about other agencies, institutions and organizations in the community?
Identify Stakeholders	**Identify the stakeholders.** Who does this affect directly or indirectly, positively or negatively? Who is taking a risk, who has responsibility?
Incorporate Racially and Culturally Appropriate Engagement Activities	**Assess scope of work for incorporating the six strategies for more inclusive engagement.** Identify relationships with communities of color, create a welcoming atmosphere at all events, ensure accessibility for all participants, develop alternative and culturally appropriate methods for engagement, maintain an ongoing presence in the community, and develop partnerships with organizations or color.
Create an Inclusive Public Engagement Plan	**Prepare a public engagement plan.** Include key activities, milestones, and products on the project timeline. **Develop a detailed work plan that includes specific engagement activities based on an overall strategy.** Identify and make use of appropriate tools consistent with the defined roles, issues, audience, and resources. Be specific in creating goals for engaging racial and ethnic communities.

QUICK TIPS
KEY STEPS TO INCLUSIVE PUBLIC ENGAGEMENT

What To Do	How To Do It
Staffing & **Organization**	**Establish the staff/resource needs for public involvement at the outset**—from communications staff, or outside facilitators to consultants. Consider potential translation and interpretation costs. **Identify an internal team to use for advice:** Set up initial and regular times to meet with them for updates and advice.
Communications & Outreach	**Create a clear identity and message** for the project from the outset. **Carry out broad outreach,** using multiple communications tools to reach the diversity of stakeholders (e.g., mailed and printed information, social media, websites and email lists, cable TV and public nservice annoucements) **Include targeted outreach** to communities of color and other affected groups that tend not to participate (consultations with leaders; info at community events, speakers, etc.) **Have a single contact point** for the public (e.g., a hotline and/or email address) to provide easy access to the public to get information and provide input, on the project. **Use the media strategically**, i.e., press releases, feature stories, op-ed's, news conferences to announce initiation of project; key milestones and decision points. Focus on community newspapers and programs, including ethnic media. **Use public facilities**, to the extent possible, like libraries, community centers, neighborhood service centers as information repositories to provide ongoing information on the project. **Use technology to promote an interactive public process**, for example your agency/organization's website to provide information and opportunities for feedback through the life of the project.

QUICK TIPS
KEY STEPS TO INCLUSIVE PUBLIC ENGAGEMENT

What To Do	How To Do it
Evaluate the Process	**Include evaluation of the overall process and of specific public activitie**s. It is critical to learn from your experience, replicating what works; changing what didn't work. **Use evaluation forms** at meetings/activities; online feedback to obtain information from stakeholders (not just the public, but other agency staff, institutions, etc. who are participating in the process). Track and record participation in the process by communities of color. **Include results of the evaluation in your report to decision makers.**

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Remember these keys to success:

- Identify the need for and purpose of public engagement.

- Identify the appropriate level of community involvement with staff and through early consultation with key stakeholders.

- Develop a public involvement plan, including strategies for inclusive engagement.

As a part of the work of your REACH Change Team, you will embark on a journey that ensures your agency/organization develops the opportunities that racial equity provides and creates sustainable processes and practices that advance cultural humility.