

## Building a Diverse & Inclusive Workforce

### Set One- What is Diversity and Inclusion?

#### Frequently Asked Questions

##### *Introduction – What is Diversity and Inclusion?*

A culturally competent organization brings together knowledge about different groups of people and transforms it into standards, policies, and practices that make everything work. Building this kind of organization requires attention from all areas of practice. The Office of Cultural & Linguistic Competence has developed a series of FAQ sheets designed to provide information on the current practices and theories in HR Diversity and Inclusion efforts. This first document in a series of FAQs provides an overview of diversity and inclusion principles and how they apply to the BHDS system.

##### *What is Diversity?*

The Society of Human Resource Management (SHRM) defines diversity in the employment context as the collective mixture of differences and similarities which includes individual and organizational characteristics, values, beliefs, experiences, backgrounds, preferences and behaviors.

##### *What is Inclusion?*

The U.S. Office of Personnel Management defines inclusion as a culture that connects each employee to the organization; encourages collaboration, flexibility, and fairness; and leverages diversity throughout the organization so that all individuals are able to participate and contribute to their full potential.

##### *The changing paradigm for D&I*

Organizational diversity initiatives have historically focused on equal employment opportunity (EEO) and affirmative employment. Yet, it is clear that organizations must now broaden their view of diversity to reflect the multidimensional aspects of our society. They must now understand and embrace the business, cultural, and demographic dimensions of diversity as well as the legal dimension. Recognizing these multiple frameworks underpinning diversity is important to shape and pursue the missions and goals of behavioral health and developmental disability organizations.

##### *Why is D&I important in BHDS organizations?*

An article in *Health Affairs* highlights three reasons for enhancing diversity in health organizations. First, as we become more diverse, clinicians will see a growing number of individuals with a range of beliefs about behavioral health and developmental disabilities. These beliefs are often influenced by their social and cultural backgrounds and may mean that individuals present and articulate symptoms differently than what has been traditionally taught in clinical education. Second, studies demonstrate that poorer health outcomes can be the result of sociocultural differences between clinicians and the individuals they serve. Third, landmark research highlighted the importance of person-centered care and cultural competence in improving quality and eliminating racial/ethnic health care disparities.<sup>1</sup> It can be persuasively argued that effective care is impossible without a workforce that is, not only culturally competent, but has diverse life experiences, language proficiencies, thinking styles, and community knowledge.

*What are some common ways that D&I can be derailed?* There are dozens of ways that even well-intentioned organizations can hinder a diverse organizational culture. Some are attributed to practices in human resources but other divisions and departments can create roadblocks as well. For example, decisions such as what to include in job descriptions and what interview questions to ask can reflect bias by hiring managers and interfere with hiring the best candidate. Utilizing only one or two recruitment sources can reduce the applicant pool over time. Failure to include

##### *Types of Diversity*

###### *Social Diversity:*

*Demographic difference such as age, race, ethics, and gender*

###### *Value Diversity:*

*Psychological difference in personality and attitudes*

###### *Information Diversity:*

*Organizational differences such as education and functions*

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cross cultural behavioral skills in annual performance evaluations can reflect an unwillingness to hold employees accountable for their ability to work cross culturally. And using staff in a bilingual capacity without testing their language proficiency demonstrates a lack of awareness of the critical function communication in our work.

#### *How can a diverse workforce be achieved?*

Diversity and inclusion is an organizational development initiative. It requires a change management strategy. To be successful, the entire organization must be involved. It means pursuing multiple and simultaneous efforts that include 1) transforming the way that employees are recruited, interviewed, hired, evaluated, and promoted 2) engaging communities to become the employer of choice 3) ensuring that diversity initiatives are aligned with organizational goals 4) creating safe spaces for employee 5) training managers and employees in how their actions impact diversity and inclusion efforts 6) celebrating success and much more.

#### **Future workforce will have huge demographic variations (US Census, 2010)**

- Residents of color account for three of every four new Virginia residents (76 %) since 2000.
- One in every 10 residents is **foreign born**, with the majority hailing from Asia (40%) or Latin America (36%).
- There are almost 100 languages other than English spoken in Virginia, with Spanish, Korean, Chinese, Vietnamese, and Tagalog among the most popular languages.
- **Demographic trends.** In the past three years, 12 % of Virginia's births were Hispanic children while 19% were African American and 6% were Asian American. The majority of the under-18 population were people of color in 22 localities in 2000, rising to 32 localities in 2010.

#### *Elements of a Diversity Initiative*

The diversity initiative is an organization's formal strategic plan for addressing diversity and inclusion. Effective initiatives tend to exhibit several characteristics such as those outlined below.

- Directly align with the organization's key business objectives.
- Sharply focusing on specific changes to the workforce and workplace that will help to achieve needed business results.
- Assess the organization's intercultural competence and capacity to accept cultural change.
- Utilizing a strategic and continuous approach to employee communication.<sup>ii</sup>

#### *In Summary*

Successful diversity and inclusion initiatives must be taken as a part of a larger organizational development enterprise and one size does not fit all. Each organization must assess their organizational culture and design plans for their specific environments. They must also be ready to make those inevitably difficult decisions that support diversity. Successful diversity initiatives rest on how amenable an organization's culture is and the extent to which management understands the drivers for diversity management. Mere agreement that diversity is a "good" thing for an organization is not sufficient. For effective change and implementation, every role in the agency must be expected to working on their piece of the diversity puzzle.

#### *References*

- National Archives and Records Administration (2012). Diversity and Inclusion Strategic Plan.
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- Society for Human Resource Management (2008) Global Diversity and Inclusion: Perceptions, Practices and Attitudes.
- United States Office of Personnel Management (2000). Building and Maintaining a Diverse, High-Quality Workforce.

<sup>i</sup> Betancourt, Joseph R., Green, Alexander R., Carrillo, J. Emilio, and Park, Elyse R. (2004) "Cultural Competence And Health Care Disparities: Key Perspectives and Trends". *Health Affairs. Volume 24, Number 2.*

<sup>ii</sup> Fiester, Margaret, SPHR. (2011). "Building a Diversity Initiative from the Ground Up." SHRM HR Knowledge Center.