



CULTURALLY SPECIFIC SERVICES

A collaborative living document

Definition

Culturally specific services are created by and for specific cultural communities with an emphasis on the voices and experiences of survivors of interpersonal violence (such as sexual violence, domestic violence, stalking, dating violence, etc).

Context

The strength, resilience, expertise and vitality of this culturally grounded work benefits all survivors and every community across our state. Culturally specific services uplift the voices and experiences of those who, because of *oppression*, have been unheard or unheeded for too long.

We know many communities are unserved, underserved, and inadequately served. Because of the endemic nature of *racism, colonialism, white supremacy* and *xenophobia* in the United States, as well as barriers that result from global cultural contexts, culturally specific services have historically been grounded in and grown from communities *marginalized* along racial, ethnic, immigrant, refugee or linguistic lines. The definition herein broadens beyond these initial categories, while recognizing the depth of need for services grounded in these communities. It strives to reflect their vision and values, as well as their lived experiences of racism and xenophobia.

Although an individual's definition of who they are culturally is complex, multi-layered and cannot be assumed by others, for the purposes of defining culturally specific services we use the term 'cultural community' to mean: a group of people united by shared experience of oppression and cultural resilience, on the basis of such identities as race, ethnicity, language, immigration or refugee status, gender identity/expression, sexual orientation, ability, blindness, Deaf/hard of hearing, religion, *Tribal sovereignty*, or other marginalized identity. We mean cultural communities whose access to safety, resources and services has been – and often still is – limited.

While we expect all domestic violence and sexual assault programs to strive for *cultural responsiveness*, culturally specific services are designed to grow from the strengths and to meet the needs of communities that are unserved, underserved, or inadequately served. Such services can be the sole focus of a nonprofit organization, or can be a program within a larger organization. Some services may identify one cultural community; others may serve multiple marginalized cultural communities simultaneously.

Service delivery models will differ based on needs and experiences of the community, as well as historic and current access to cultural/political power and to resources.

CRITERIA

Ideally all services should:

- Maintain survivor safety and confidentiality;
- Demonstrate clear and measurable goals and objectives;
- Engage in ongoing anti-racism and anti-oppression training;
- Have an active anti-oppression, *cultural competency*, or equity plan;
- Provide culturally responsive services to a broad array of intersecting cultures/identities;
- And implement effective processes for collecting and utilizing survivor input for program development and evaluation.

In addition, culturally specific services meet most or (ideally) all of the following criteria:

1. Culturally grounded interventions are founded and designed from the ground up, by and for members of the cultural community and with ongoing guidance from survivors in the community.
2. The cultural community's lived experiences, core cultural constructs, and particular needs (as defined by people from that community) inform the design and implementation of services and decision-making.
3. Services are culturally focused; values, behaviors, expectations, norms and worldview of the cultural community are present at every level of service delivery.
4. Services and materials are provided in an accessible format in the primary language of the cultural group and/or individual survivor.
5. The community being served (including individuals, groups, other providers) recognizes the program as a culturally specific provider, and a majority of people served are from the cultural community.
6. Staff are mostly people of the cultural community.
7. *Decision makers*, board members, management, leadership and/or *advisory boards* are mostly people of the cultural community, and/or consistently and actively engage in ongoing learning, process and practice to support alignment of services with needs and values of the cultural community; if members are mostly dominant culture people, there is a plan and timeline in place for increasing equity in leadership.

GLOSSARY

Advisory board: A board appointed to advise the chief administrator or executive director; a body that provides non-binding strategic advice to the management. In the context of culturally specific services, often a deliberately multi-cultural or culturally specific board bringing together leaders from the cultural community in order to educate and guide the organization.

Colonialism: A practice of domination, which involves the subjugation of one group of people by another. The establishment, exploitation, maintenance, acquisition, and expansion of colony in one territory by a political power from another territory. It is a set of unequal relationships between the colonial power and the colony, and often between the colonists and the indigenous population. Also called imperialism.

Cultural competence: Ongoing learning and integration of knowledge into practice. The ability to communicate with, cooperate with, and serve people from all cultural identities with respect, professionalism, integrity, and fairness in a manner that recognizes the individual dignity of each person. The practice of learning to recognize and reject one's assumptions about culture; focus on understanding the information provided by an individual within the context at hand; and forgo the temptation to classify or label people with cultural misinformation.

Cultural responsiveness: Practices undertaken by an organization of one cultural community (perhaps, though not necessarily, a dominant cultural group) to respond to participants of another cultural community; a complement to, **not** a substitute for, culturally specific services.

Culturally specific organization: An entire organization that strongly embodies the criteria outlined above.

Culturally specific program: A program that strongly embodies the criteria outlined above, that may be situated within a mainstream organization.

Decision makers: May include Tribal councils or governments, traditional governance boards, advisory boards, or other collective bodies charged with making high-level decisions regarding provision of services.

Dominant (or mainstream) culture: Refers to a cultural group that has pervasive, systemic power and privilege.

Intersectionality: A term coined by Kimberle Crenshaw in 1989, referring to the study of intersections between forms or systems of oppression, domination or discrimination. An example is Black feminism, which argues that the experience of being a black female cannot be understood in terms of being black, and of being female, considered independently, but must include the interactions, which frequently reinforce each other.

Marginalization: The process of pushing a group of people to the margins, either literally (as in gentrification) or figuratively (as in a lack of media representation).

Oppression: A system or worldview based in and placing value on hierarchy, domination, exploitation, violence, degradation, control and power over others. This system uses an imbalance in power to exploit one group to benefit another. It involves the systematic and pervasive mistreatment of people on the basis of their membership in a disadvantaged group, and occurs on several levels (interpersonal, cultural, institutional and structural).

Racism: Oppression based on racial identity, and rooted in white supremacy; pervasive privilege and power for white people; systematic mistreatment of people of color.

Tribal sovereignty: Refers to tribes' right to govern themselves, define their own membership, manage tribal property, and regulate tribal business and domestic relations; it further recognizes the existence of a government-to-government relationship between such tribes and the federal government.

White supremacy: The belief that white people are superior to those of all other races, especially the Black race, and should therefore dominate society.

Xenophobia: The unreasoned fear of that which is perceived to be foreign or strange; exclusion of groups of people who are considered outsiders, even if they've resided in the US for long periods of time or were colonized by forces that became the US.

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