Incorporating Culturally-Responsive Data Practices

Many of our systems in North America are designed by and for white people. Because foundations and government agencies are part of those systems, based in white cultural norms, many of the processes and available tools for community-based organizations are biased toward those norms. That may include the screenings and assessments funders ask us to use, our data collection processes, and how we use the data we collect. Using the same tools and processes for all of our clients and ignoring diversity in culture and lived experience, will mean our data is not actually representative of the communities we serve. Here are a few of our best practices for ensuring your data processes are culturally responsive.

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Acknowledge Historical Context

A legacy of **harmful research practices** has adversely affected BIPOC communities, people with disabilities, LGBTQIA+ communities, and others through a lack of transparency, discriminatory practices, and emotional and bodily harm; this history can influence perceptions of research today. At a minimum, programs and organizations should consider the historical context of different communities' experience with research and seek to address any concerns as they prepare to engage families.

History is a crucial component of culture that should be considered and respected during data-gathering processes. As history is complex, the same events can be experienced differently by different groups of people, especially Black, Indigenous, and other people of color, people with disabilities, and the LGBTQIA+ communities. At a minimum, programs and organizations should look into and acknowledge the history of their work with the communities they are serving. Historical context and community perceptions of research, and your organization, may inform participants' willingness to share sensitive information.

What is *Culturally Responsive*?

Being **culturally responsive** includes being **culturally competent** (being able to engage and communicate with people from other cultures) and having **cultural humility** (critically evaluating one's own beliefs, practices, biases and assumptions to maintain a lifelong commitment to readdressing societal power imbalances).

Informed Consent

Participants should be fully informed, understanding the aims of the data collection, and **voluntarily consent** to participate. They should be able to withdraw from participation at any time without consequence. If choosing not to share will impact someone's ability to receive services, this should be made clear before the data gathering process begins. Carefully disclosing potential risk and strategies to prevent privacy breaches may especially be important for populations who have been harmed or who are undocumented.

Acculturation

Be mindful that immigrant or refugee families participating in the data collection will also be dealing with stresses as they adapt to the **dominant culture** in which they live. Programs should be prepared to accommodate different literacy levels, do their best to anticipate translation requests and/or provide high-quality interpreters, respect and honor culture-specific holidays, and facilitate U.S. institution and resource navigation, among other strategies.

Power Structures

Recognize the **inherent power structures** between the program and the client that exist despite relationship building. Clients may feel they are required to answer the questions to continue to receive high quality services. Programs should remind and assure clients that sharing data is in no way connected to services received. Despite assurances, be aware that it still may feel uncomfortable for clients to refuse to participate or answer some questions due to perceived power differences.

Clarity

Communicate with families in ways that make the most sense to them. **Transparent** and **clear** communication helps keep community members informed, builds trust, and signals respect. Use plain language, translate when needed, and give time and space for people to understand.

Cultural Norms

Make an effort to learn the **preferred cultural norms** of families and their communities. In some cultures, individuals use words to convey meaning overtly and explicitly, whereas others show their reactions through facial expressions, gestures, posture, and body language.

Flexible Engagement

Given different family constraints, comfort levels, and perception of time, programs should be prepared to **make accommodations** like virtual meetings, flexible start/end times, and stipends for transportation or childcare to ensure all families are willing and able to participate.

Build Trust

Establish rapport or connection with families throughout the intake processes. **Take time** to get to know your clients and let them get to know you. This is important to do before collecting data that is potentially sensitive. Transparency around how the data will be used, who will have access to the data, and the impacts of not participating in the data gathering will also help to build trust.

Welcoming Setting

Choose settings and locations for data collection that are both convenient and appropriate for families to minimize travel time and **maximize comfort**. Places of worship, workplaces, or community centers are good options. When appropriate, consider meeting in participants' homes, especially if suggested by cultural norms, and if transportation/childcare cannot be offered.

Sharing Results

Sharing results with the community is another way to **give back** or **reciprocate** and acknowledge that data ultimately belongs to the communities from which it comes. Sharing findings enhances the community's knowledge and capacity, avoids exploitation, strengthens interpretation of results, and demonstrates respect.

Translations

If the research is conducted with communities who speak a language other than English, a thoughtful **translation process** should be included in the plan. This includes American Sign Language (ASL) as needed. Translations should cover all other materials in addition to the form such as informed consent documents. Interpreters should be provided for in-person and virtual meetings as needed. Symbols, pictures, and directions should also be analyzed for their cultural relevance. Consider a **system of translation and backtranslation** to improve the accuracy and relevance, and/or create a team of two experts, one handling adaptations and one handling translations.

Accessibility

Disabilities are often not considered during research processes. **Accessibility** can be addressed by making an effort to understand client disabilities, providing clear introductory statements explaining the nature of the research, employing active listening skills such as frequent summarization, offering flexibility for data collection and modes of collecting data, and using various communication systems, if necessary, like augmentative communication devices, voice output systems, or picture symbols.