



REACHING NEW HEIGHTS

**Cultural Proficiency for Your Staff, Your Organization and the
Clients you Serve**

Program Summary
February, 2011



We've had a couple of other starts and stops with other groups, but the authenticity that comes from each and every Reaching New Heights staff was priceless. They're unapologetic about culture being broad without dismissing the importance of race and ethnicity.

For an agency that's not sure about which direction they want to go with their cultural proficiency work, Reaching New Heights is a brilliant choice.

~ Paul Lambros ~
Executive Director, Plymouth Housing Group



Why Cultural Proficiency Matters for Organizations

Cultural proficiency is good for business.

According to a federal Glass Ceiling Commission study conducted in 1995, Standard and Poors 500 companies that were rated in the bottom 100 on diversity-related measures earned an average of 7.9% return on investment, while companies rated in the top 100 earned an average of 18.3%.

Harvard Business School professors Robin Ely and David Thomas found through their research that the benefit of cultural proficiency training and integration, when done right, pays off in a healthier and more productive organization. Specifically, they note, it will allow for:

- Better communication despite accent and language barriers;
- More effective motivation of workers through the accurate interpretation of behaviors and the design of culturally aware motivation strategies;
- The accurate evaluation of culturally diverse applicants and employees through a better understanding of presentation styles, behaviors, and language facility; and
- Harmony and comfort in the workplace through an understanding of the motivations and perspectives of others.

Moreover, organizational cultural proficiency minimizes:

- Worker alienation that can result from misunderstandings of etiquette, values, and behaviors;
- Costly discrimination suits that arise from poor communication and worker alienation;
- Unnecessary terminations that result from communication breakdown and misinterpretation of employee behavior; and
- Your managers' reluctance to hire and work with culturally diverse employees.

But it is important to distinguish between diversity and cultural proficiency. Many organizations mandate diversity trainings for their employees, but that does not necessarily foster a culturally proficient work environment. And even though an organization has achieved "diversity" as measured by racial, gender or other dimensions, lack of cultural proficiency can produce a host of problems, such as inter-personal conflicts, high staff turnover, substandard service and even lawsuits. Achieving cultural proficiency is not a one-step process. It requires a commitment of resources, hard work, willingness to change and leadership. But in order for organizations to thrive in this age, it is not enough to simply give lip service to awareness of diversity. They need to invest in integrating cultural proficiency initiatives into an organization's values, policies, and programs.



Reaching New Heights: A Systems Approach to Cultural and Community Proficiency

Reaching New Heights provides a framework for organizations to explore cultural proficiency issues on an individual, team, organizational and systems levels. The framework leads organizations to:

- ⇒ Improve access to services for marginalized clients;
- ⇒ Enhance service delivery approaches that reduce misunderstanding and conflict;
- ⇒ Improve comfort and confidence in using effective skills and approaches with diverse populations;
- ⇒ Achieve and inclusive and equitable workplace, whose organizational values are aligned with the values of the community; and
- ⇒ Strengthen community collaboration and partnerships based on mutual regard and understanding.

Using a multi-tiered approach to increasing cultural and community proficiency, **Reaching New Heights** ensures sustainable actions regarding issues of culture, diversity and parity in how clients access and receive/experience services. Organizations committed to these concepts seek more than tag lines to be used by their boards, administrators, managers and staff. They also strive for these concepts to live and breathe within the organization.

Services include:

- **Organizational Assessment**
An examination of management systems, current cultural proficiency initiatives, services and protocols; a review of physical facility in which services are provided; development of demographic and health profiles of communities of interest; and help with implementation of recommendations to bring about appropriate and realistic changes.
- **Staff Training**
Half-day to two-day sessions with staff from all areas of the organization to explore a model of diversity and cultural proficiency; explore some attributes and skills helpful in cross-cultural experiences; and identify and practice using skills that ease cross-cultural communication and increase cross-cultural understanding.
- **Group Presentations**
Presentation at conferences, summits, or other settings that bring together service providers, policymakers, and other stakeholders to increase shared understanding of diversity issues and options to address them.



The **Reaching New Heights** team works with clients through the following steps to ensure full and comprehensive outcomes.

Step One—Ensuring Leadership Support

- In conjunction with Executive Leadership identify a team leader and liaison and convene a Steering Committee comprised of members of the leadership team and possibly board members and staff.
- Affirm the committee’s roles and responsibilities and develop a work plan.
- Communicate the process to the Board, staff, and/or volunteers, as appropriate

Step Two—Reviewing Data and Organizational Documents

- Support the team leader and liaison in collecting data and organizational documents.
- Review data and organizational documents and summarize the results.

Step Three—Conducting the Management Assessment

- Identify administrators and managers to be interviewed.
- Conduct interviews and, if indicated, identify and collect supplementary materials that may support interview findings
- Compile and summarize interview findings.

Step Four—Conducting the Staff and Volunteer Assessment

- Identify a representative sample of staff to be interviewed.
- Conduct interviews and, if indicated, identify and collect supplementary materials that may support interview findings.
- Compile and summarize interview findings.

Step Five—Conducting Consumer Surveys and Community Assessment

- Identify a representative sample of consumers to be contacted.
- Conduct focus groups.
- Compile and summarize results.
- Explore opportunities for community mapping and assessment to create a current description of the communities in the client’s service area.

Step Six—Reviewing Findings and Developing an Action Plan

- Review all findings with multiple audiences.
- Implement an action planning process that includes use of the Stages of Readiness model to develop, launch and sustain cultural and community proficiency efforts.



As a result of the Reaching New Heights our clients have....

Established a statement supporting cultural proficiency and informed all of our supporters and constituents through their newsletter.

Added statements of cultural proficiency to their job announcements, interview processes and job descriptions.

Developed their first written policy on professional development and continuing education.

Included cultural proficiency in all training curricula.

Integrated how they would address cultural proficiency in their workplans.

Dedicated part of a director's position to the implementation of our cultural proficiency work.

Revised their mission and values statements to include cultural proficiency.

Changed their client services policies to allow for more access and equity for their constituents.



What clients say about Reaching New Heights

“The Center for Health Training has a clear definition of cultural proficiency which really helped. So much about this work can go really well or really bad. This is a broader reach to the topic (beyond race) which we really loved.”

“They were very gracious with their time and generosity. They brought food to our client focus groups which made it a major success.”

“Anytime we were stumbling, they had the experience of that and helped us through that stumbling part. They’ve heard it all and they were available with guidance and help pull through the issues.”



Reaching New Heights is a program of the Center for Health Training, a non-profit firm with offices in Seattle, Oakland and Austin that delivers culturally appropriate training and technical assistance, research and program evaluation, conference management, and capacity building services. Their mission is to improve organizations' abilities to deliver accessible, high quality, culturally proficient, and compassionate services to their clients.

For more information:

Center for Health Training
1809 7th Ave # 400
Seattle, WA 98101-1341
(206) 447-9538
seattle@jba-cht.com

References

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2. Lagace, M., "Racial Diversity Pays Off," Harvard Business School Working Knowledge Journal, June 21, 2004.
3. DiClemente, C., Norcross, J., Prochaska, J., Changing for Good: A Revolutionary Six-Stage Program for Overcoming Bad Habits and Moving Your Life Positively Forward, Avon Books, 1994.





The Four Friends Parable

It so happened there were four friends—a bird, a rabbit, a monkey and an elephant. One day, these four animals came together and began to tell their stories to see who was older and wiser. They came upon a great tree in the forest. The elephant said that he could remember when the tree was his height—“At this time I gave it water to grow.” So then the monkey said, “Oh, then I must be senior to you, because I can remember when I was small the tree was so small that I could hop over the tree. I could go over to the tree and prune its leaves.” And then the rabbit said, “Oh, in that case I must be elder to you, because when the tree was just sprouting out from the ground, I gave it manure. It is because of my manure it grew into a big tree so fast.” The bird said, “In that case I am much, much wiser and elder than you all, because I was the one who brought the seed from a great distance and placed it in the ground.” Despite her size, the friends found that the bird was the eldest, the wisest.

And it was so that they had all in their own way contributed to the nurturing and growth of the tree. Size wise and strength wise there were great differences among the friends; the bird was so small and the elephant so powerful. Yet, the friends lived in harmony and respected each other very much. It is because of the power of this friendship, and this respect for each other, that all the surrounding areas in the province experienced such good things

