

# Definitions and Principles of Cultural Competency

## Definitions of Cultural Competency

**CULTURE:** A system of values which motivates individual and group behaviors, social interactions and customs. Culture both influences and is influenced by: family structure and dynamics, race, ethnicity, national origin, language, geography, education, art, music, religious and spiritual beliefs, economic circumstances, political systems and beliefs, politics, gender, age, sexual orientation and other defining characteristics.

**SUBCULTURE:** A population within a culture which can be identified by distinct characteristics and needs.

**COMPETENCY:** A required level of knowledge, skills and experience.

**CULTURAL COMPETENCY:** Possessing a set of skills, knowledge, behaviors, attitudes and policies that enable an individual, organization or system to work effectively in cross-cultural situations and with members of subcultures.

**A CULTURALLY COMPETENT NONPROFIT OR COMMUNITY ORGANIZATION** is an organization that acknowledges and incorporates at all levels: the importance of culture, the dynamics that result from cultural differences, and the expansion of cultural knowledge. The organization demonstrates an ability to adapt its services to meet culturally unique needs, and to communicate effectively. Members of a culturally competent organization treat clients, co-workers and board members of all cultures and from all walks of life with honor and respect.

## Guiding Principles of Cultural Competency

1. Treat all clients in a non-judgmental way and with dignity and respect.
2. Define culture broadly, encompassing an individual's orientation to life; family structure; race; ethnicity; national origin; language; education; art and music; food; spirituality/beliefs; class/socioeconomic status; acculturation; politics; gender; sexual orientation; and other defining characteristics.
3. Recognize and respect that culture is ever changing and evolving.
4. Recognize the diversity within and among communities.
5. Recognize the dynamics that result from cultural differences.
6. Recognize and be sensitive to language and dialects used by different communities.
7. Develop, support and adapt services that meet culturally unique needs of the population being served.
8. Support services that develop leadership within the community so as to strengthen the capacity of the communities being served.
9. Actively recruit, hire and train individuals at all levels who reflect the community being served.
10. Actively recruit and train a Board of Directors that reflects the community being served.
11. Support inter-agency cooperation and partnerships among grass roots organizations serving similar communities to enhance services.
12. Recognize and celebrate successes within the community being served.
13. Be accountable for addressing the complexity of culture, and question and challenge cultural stereotypes.

*Source: What Works! United Way of Santa Cruz County*