Contracting and Procurement
for Culturally Specific and Responsive Services

Multnomah County

For many years, Multnomah County has been a place where different families have very different experiences, not because of the skills they could bring to work, or their education, but because of the color of their skin or the place they were born. Growing up in Portland, my family benefited from policies that helped people stay in school, attend college, rent in a safe neighborhood or borrow money for a house. But for other families, the impacts of institutional and systemic racism and other forms of oppression have prevented generations from getting those same opportunities to thrive.

The data and research clearly show that these disparate experiences and opportunities remain – and are sustained – across many indicators. They include health disparities, educational attainment, access to living wage jobs, and overrepresentation in the criminal justice system. The policies and practices that are at the root of these inequities were never fair and continue to harm by sending a recurring and powerful message to these communities that they don't deserve to reach their full potential.

To truly close those gaps, we have to design and deliver our programs to meet the community needs that exist today. And that means not just what we fund, but how we fund. This countywide guidance for culturally specific services supports this critical work and is a directive that advances our collective vision of safety, trust and belonging.

Equity will be a fundamental component of our contracting and purchasing policies. It is our obligation as a public institution to get the best value for the taxpayer and the best outcome for all of our clients. It is this responsibility that moves us to create opportunities for culturally specific and culturally responsive services to both demonstrate the impact and build capacity across our systems to carry out the county's work.

The county first applied its equity lens to purchasing and contracting in the SUN Service System in 2016 followed by the Domestic Violence Coordination Office and the Aging, Disability and Veterans' Division in 2017. By acknowledging what's happened in the past and applying the equity lens tools, we are calling out inequities and barriers that have persisted in our processes and working to develop systems that support all people in Multnomah County to succeed.

As an organization, we're constantly reevaluating how we do things. Our investments have impacts on community and we believe changing our procurement and contracting processes will create more positive outcomes for all.

Deborah Kafoury
Multnomah County Chair

At Multnomah County, we are committed to examining the ways our policies, procedures, practices and organizational culture contribute to injustice and institutional racism, as well as opportunities for fairness, inclusion, belonging, and community well-being for all. Our goal is to use strategies to target resources that are culturally responsive and appropriate to our communities most negatively impacted by systemic racism, health inequity and barriers to opportunity and to advance positive outcomes for all our residents.

The Office of Diversity and Equity (ODE) intends for this guidance to inform policymakers as well as community members and organizations working to incorporate racial equity into service delivery and decision-making in the fields of contracting and purchasing. The guidance describes Multnomah County's *targeted universalist approach* and ways to integrate such strategies into Requests for Proposal and other investment processes.

Key strategies for transforming structures, systems and policies that contribute to racial inequity include shifting the ways in which funding and resources are allocated, and designing programming to meet individual and community needs. It is our belief that by design Culturally Specific Services diminish structural barriers and provide a sense of safety and belonging that leads to better outcomes for people experiencing racism and discrimination. We also believe that all services that Multnomah County provides should be culturally responsive and thereby able to adapt to the diversity of communities served.

The following guidance creates a framework for the County's contracting and procurement processes as staff consider and implement these best practices. In addition, this guidance creates opportunities for organizations competing for County contracts to demonstrate their capacity through the RFP process, and increase the capacity for those organizations who can best provide Culturally Specific and Responsive Services.

Key Definitions:
Racial Equity, Cultural Competency, and Culturally Specific and Responsive Services

The following sections will first define the terms, provide a template of activities to move through the process, then demonstrate how to utilize and measure in a procurement.

Contracting and procurement for Culturally Specific and Responsive Services aligns with Multnomah County's value of social justice and promoting equity in communities. While the terms "Culturally Specific", "Culturally Responsive", "Cultural Competency" and "Racial Equity" are interrelated, the distinctions are significant. Program staff should be clear about what they mean through intentional and deliberate choice of language.

Racial equity is the fair and just distribution of resources and access to opportunities for communities of color across sustainable economic, relational, and social systems, as well as the meaningful engagement of communities of color in program planning, design, decision-making, implementation and evaluation. All communities are empowered through bold, courageous and continuous commitment to identifying and dismantling the root causes of racism.

Cultural competency is a set of behaviors, attitudes and policies that enable an individual, agency or institution to work effectively in diverse and cross-cultural situations. Achieving cultural competence requires valuing and adapting to diversity, institutionalizing cultural knowledge, an ability to manage the dynamics of cultural difference, and regular self-assessment and evaluation.[1]

Cultural competency is a continuum, and possessing basic cultural competency is typically a precursor to being qualified to provide *culturally specific and responsive services*. But it should not by itself be considered sufficient to demonstrate those qualifications.

Culturally responsive services are general services that have been adapted to honor and align with the beliefs, practices, culture and linguistic needs of diverse consumer/client populations and communities whose members identify as having particular cultural or linguistic affiliations by virtue of their place of birth, ancestry or ethnic origin, religion, preferred language or language spoken at home. **Culturally responsive services also refer to services provided in a way that is culturally responsive to the varied and intersecting "biological, social and cultural categories such as gender identity, class, ability, sexual orientation, religion, caste, and other axes of identity."[2]** *Culturally responsive organizations* typically refer to organizations that possess the knowledge and capacity to respond to the issues of diverse, multicultural communities at multiple intervention points. *Culturally responsive organizations* affirmatively adopt and integrate the cultural and social norms and practices of the communities they serve. These agencies seek to comprehensively address internal power and privilege dynamics throughout their service delivery, personnel practices and leadership structure.[3]

Culturally specific services are services provided for specific populations based on their particular needs, where the majority of members/clients are reflective of that community, and use language, structures and settings familiar to the culture of the target population to create an environment of belonging and safety in which services are delivered. Culturally specific organizations typically refer to organizations with a majority of members/clients from a particular community. Culturally specific organizations also have a culturally focused organizational identity and environment, a positive track record of successful community engagement, and recognition from the community served as advancing the best interests of that community.[4]

These definitions describe the organizational and programmatic elements intended to eliminate structural barriers and create environments that ensure safety and belonging.

In order to successfully implement this guidance, program staff should note the following distinction: every provider of services should be Culturally Responsive. When procuring for Culturally Specific Services, raters should specifically examine the demonstrated characteristics of applicant organizations' service programs to ensure they are best suited to delivering culturally specific services to the proposed population(s).

We are clear that it's not the makeup of the organization itself that we are focusing on, but rather the characteristics and applied principles of culturally specific service delivery that matter most.

These characteristics and principles include:

- **Mission statements that are aligned with the needs of the communities served**
    - E.g., organization and/or mission are based on community's lived experience

- **Knowledge of the effects of structural and individual racism and discrimination, and specific racial/ethnic disparities the community faces**
    - E.g., services adapted to meet cultural norms and identity of community served

- **Multiple formal and informal channels exist for meaningful community engagement and participation, which can and does result in desired community change**
    - Channels are consistent with community's cultural norms and affirm positive cultural identity, and include opportunities for feedback throughout organization

- **Robust recruitment, hiring practices and leadership development result in diverse and skilled workforce that demonstrate shared experience and are trusted by the community served**
    - Demonstrates commitment to addressing power dynamics through reflection of relational worldviews in support of community empowerment

[1] National Center for Cultural Competence (NCCC), Georgetown University; https://nccc.georgetown.edu/foundations/framework.php

[2] https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/intersectionality

[3] Id., p. 82.; j. powell, consultant interview, Haas Institute for a Fair and Inclusive Society, U.C. Berkeley. September 8, 2015.

[4] Curry-Stevens, A., Reyes, M.E. & Coalition of Communities of Color (2014). Protocol for Culturally Responsive Organizations. Portland, OR: Center to Advance Racial Equity, Portland State University.

Conditions to Support Culturally Specific and Responsive Services

Implementing a policy to provide Culturally Specific and Responsive Services disrupts the status quo and requires a shift in cultural practice. Multnomah County departments should secure political, legal and community support as a precondition to implementing this policy.

Program staff should first consider the following factors before developing an RFP process and rating criteria to provide Culturally Specific and Responsive Services:

Common Vision: program staff should share vision for desired outcomes and how Culturally Specific Services can achieve these results

Applied Theory: staff employ a targeted universal framework that provides services to address problems experienced by marginalized populations while broadening its scope to cover as many people as possible

Engagement with stakeholders: staff should identify and map impacted partners, community members and policymakers to ensure that stakeholders have opportunities for inquiry about definitions and eligibility, can identify potential collaborative opportunities early in the process, ask questions about the procurement process (for new applicants, or smaller organizations), and express concerns about potential implications and impact

Communication: develop a communication plan that strategically connects with key stakeholders and includes strategy for media (talking points, primary leadership contact)

Legal Analysis: no explicit consideration of racial indicators of applicant organization (e.g. makeup of board, staff, membership), but rather, the characteristics of their service programs (i.e. designed/adapted to meet the needs of those experiencing racism and discrimination)

Definition and Rating: includes clear definitions and expectations along with a transparent rating system

Defendable allocation metric (i.e., relative to community demographics such as race, socioeconomic status, etc.) considers the capacity of culturally specific service providers, establishes a "floor" for funding allocation (minimum funding to meet the service delivery expectations), and is developed in collaboration and/or with validation of communities being served

Evaluation: process incorporates an expectation for how to evaluate service delivery, focused on both qualitative and quantitative metrics (e.g., outcomes to be achieved, experience of service recipients, ease of scoring, etc.)

Broader Equity Impacts: staff can identify co-benefits of allocating resources in a culturally specific manner, beyond greater efficacy of service delivery (e.g., capacity-building for service organization, leadership development, etc.)

Model RFP: Questions, Criteria and Scoring

The following RFP is based on one developed by Schools Uniting Neighborhood (SUN) in 2015 with support from Multnomah County. During this RFP process, two important lessons learned are: 1) raters reported that the definitions and criteria were generally easy to understand, apply and score when evaluating applications and 2) raters that received an orientation prior to the evaluation process reported more confidence in understanding, applying and scoring the criteria.

This example RFP is one model that reflects our commitment to ensuring that every provider of services is culturally responsive and those providers that deliver culturally specific services are the best suited to do so. These questions, criteria and scoring are meant to provide a starting point to guide staff as they develop their RFPs. The total number of questions and how those questions are tailored for the specific procurement should be done on a case-by-case basis.

Model RFP for Multnomah County Contracting and Procurement:

Based on Culturally Specific Questions from Multnomah County Schools Uniting Neighborhoods (2015)

1. Organizational Mission and Capacity

This is a three-part question about why your organization is situated and has sufficient capacity to provide Culturally Specific Services to the Culturally Specific Population you are proposing to serve.

a) Organizational Mission

Describe how the mission of your organization speaks to the culturally specific community your organization is proposing to serve, and how the mission is demonstrated both internally and externally.

Evaluation Criteria:

- Demonstrates alignment of mission with improving outcomes for specific communities experiencing racism and discrimination, including description of why organization was created and direct connection between mission statement and community need

- Provides examples such as a racial equity action plan, external communication plan, and strategic plan to address equity, leadership development, and policy advocacy

b) Organizational Capacity and Experience

Describe your organization's capacity and experience in the provision of social services in the region, and how this directly relates to your proposal to provide services for [_____]. Identify any assets your organization can bring to enhance your ability to provide services in this community.

Evaluation Criteria:

- Describes history of working in region and participating in community events and activities, and how this directly relates to and supports proposal

- Articulates reasons how and why the organization is effective working with this Culturally Specific population, such as how the organizational culture (i.e., values, norms, history, practices) is aligned with and complements the population served

- Describes assets the organization can bring to increase success, such as placing services within the community and establishing partnerships with new key stakeholders

c) Ability to Adapt to the Needs of the Community

Describe how you tailor your organization's services to meet the culturally specific needs of individuals and the community. Provide specific examples of how your work with culturally specific communities informs future service design, delivery and staffing decisions. Describe how your organizational culture and staff training directly support improved outcomes for

service recipients with multiple identities experiencing multiple forms of oppression, including two or more of transgender or gender expansive, multi-racial, disabled, lesbian, gay, bisexual, and others.

Evaluation Criteria:

- Demonstrates a high degree of cultural awareness of the community served, such as family structure and roles, traditional parenting practices, health and safety beliefs/ practices, immigration dynamics, religious beliefs, distrust of systems, etc.

- Demonstrates how programming is designed and developed based on the cultural values, behaviors, norms and worldviews of the populations served, with appropriate structural, cultural and linguistic elements specific to the community

- Demonstrates how programming responds and adapts to changing demographics and community needs, with support from organization's leadership

- Demonstrates capacity and experience to engage all children, youth and families and individuals with multiple identities (i.e., cites examples, at least one of each)

2. Community Knowledge and Relationships

This is a two-part question about the organization's community knowledge and relationships. Intimate knowledge of the conditions and barriers faced by the community you intend to serve is critical to both delivering services and creating a sense of safety and belonging for service recipients and families. Intimate relationships with key stakeholders in the community contribute to establishing the trust necessary to carry out service programs in an inclusive and successful manner.

a) Identifying and Eliminating Barriers

Demonstrate your understanding of the key characteristics of the Culturally Specific Population you are proposing to serve, including specific structural, cultural and linguistic barriers the community faces within dominant culture. Provide examples of specific knowledge and experiences your organization has with this community and how your organization is uniquely positioned to eliminate such barriers and advance successful initiatives to create a sense of safety and belonging. Explain how your approach has improved individual or community outcomes, including at least one example of how your organization engages in policy advocacy to overcome identified barriers.

Evaluation Criteria:

- Demonstrates intimate knowledge of lived experience of the community it seeks to serve, including the impact of structural and individual racism or discrimination on the community

- Describes characteristics of the Culturally Specific Population, including current demographics, community needs assessment, and data documenting specific disparities faced by the community and how the organization is responding to those disparities

- Provides examples of successful program delivery in overcoming such barriers,

including at least one example of policy advocacy and the outcome of such engagement

- Demonstrates a commitment to safety and belonging in the design and implementation of services and structures reflective of the cultural norms and worldview of the community

b) Community Relationships

Discuss any established or potential partnerships and relationships that strengthen your ability to deliver services and support collaboration among key community organizations.

Evaluation Criteria:

- Provides specific examples of meaningful engagement with the Culturally Specific Population, including previous and current work in/with that community and established or emerging relationships with key community stakeholders

- Demonstrates knowledgeable of key social service, civic and faith-based organizations who work within community and how the applicant will work within this context to achieve goals

3. Staff Retention and Support Strategies

This is a two-part question about hiring and retention practices. Hiring, supporting and retaining qualified staff that demonstrate shared experience and trust the community(ies) served is a key element of organizational readiness to provide culturally specific services and achieving successful outcomes with service recipients.

a) Recruiting and Retaining Staff

Describe your organization's approach to recruitment of direct service and supervisory staff who demonstrate shared experience and trust with the communities being served, including the structures, systems and practices in place to support staff to be successful in your organization and with program participants. Describe how your organization takes into account the racial, ethnic, cultural, socioeconomic or other personal background experiences of direct service staff in training and retention practices, and how this directly contributes to programmatic success.

Evaluation Criteria:

- Describes staff recruitment efforts that demonstrate shared experience and trust with the community(ies) served

- Details strategies used throughout the organization to support and retain staff and increase their effectiveness, such as regular individual supervision, professional development opportunities, staff meeting dynamics, inclusive program planning and review activities

- Describes how organization is considerate of staff members' individual cultural identities and how these identities and experiences relate to support and retention practices

b) Trauma Support

Describe your organizational approach to considering issues related to direct and indirect trauma experienced by staff and how your organization effectively supports staff to heal and overcome these barriers.

Evaluation Criteria:

- Describes experience and realistic plans to support staff to manage effects of confronting and addressing pervasive trauma and harm to service recipients and families

- Articulates how the organization incorporates knowledge about trauma, healing and oppression into policies, practices and procedures to support staff and practice self-care

- Describes a viable feedback process to learn from staff about their experiences in providing direct services to vulnerable populations and how to strengthen supportive practices

4. Evaluation and Continuous Improvement

This two-part question focuses on how the organization collects and integrates both quantitative and qualitative data and engages, or will engage, in effective evaluation and continuous improvement processes throughout the organization.

a) Data Collection and Participant Feedback

Describe how the organization collects and integrates both quantitative and qualitative data from service delivery outcomes and service recipients about your organization's delivery of culturally specific and responsive services.

Evaluation Criteria:

- Describes systems for data collection and review of service delivery outcomes

- Describes how organization collects, analyzes and successfully implements and integrates feedback from program participants

b) Evaluation and Improvement

Describe how the organization incorporates and utilizes both quantitative and qualitative data to inform the way in which the organization provides services, providing specific example(s) of program development and delivery decisions that have been improved as a result.

Evaluation Criteria:

- Describes systems for evaluation of data and continuous improvement

- Provides specific example/s of program development decisions that have been and are informed by participant voices and perspectives