

Strengthening Institutional Services to Enable Access

Fact Sheet

STOP Administrators from diverse States and Territories gathered at the October 2015 Women of Color Network Level I and Level II Action Meetings to continue their work to enhance reach and resources to underserved populations. The following are key learnings for the field gleaned from Administrator and WOCN expertise and facilitated conversations. This factsheet augments the WOCN Toolkit for STOP Administrators on serving underserved communities, particularly the section on Utilizing a Social Justice Framework.

Guiding Principles

Remember: The underserved is not one category.

Remember: People do not have barriers but programs and services do!

Key Learning

The battered women's movement in the United States made landmark changes that deserve celebration. And it has also often fostered services fashioned to White, straight, middle class, able-bodied, non-immigrant, and women survivors. For un-served, underserved, and inadequately served communities, providing culturally responsive services is critical in enabling access to services and safety for survivors. We must both foster agencies that provide culturally relevant services and ensure all programs assess and challenge systemic, external, and internal racism and bias on an ongoing basis in order to reach and serve all survivors effectively.

What Are Challenges to Providing Culturally Relevant and Responsive Services to Underserved Communities?

Mainstream organizations offer vital services and networks. And yet, culturally specific services in mainstream organizations may encounter challenges such as:

- Programming for survivors from historically-oppressed communities that has not been designed with survivor input but is simply an extension of general programming;
- A totalizing understanding of culture that does not see culture as evolving and all survivors as multi-faceted individuals and community members;
- A reliance on blaming "culture" rather than challenging historical oppressions, policies, and laws in the U.S. that foster and lead to inequity; and,
- Inadequate staffing, resources, and policies that may place disproportionate burdens on staff from marginalized communities and/or further isolate survivors of color and indigenous survivors.

Culturally-specific organizations offer vital community support. And yet, culturally specific agencies may encounter challenges in fully serving survivors such as:

- Lack of funds and resources to address the vast need;
- Lack of capacity to provide holistic and/or integrated services and/or to foster systems changes to enable more equitable services;

- Inequity in relationships with mainstream agencies; and,
- Pushback from mainstream agencies and advocates on culturally-rooted responses that may involve or center movement building, community action, restorative justice, faith, ceremonies, or non-traditional modes of accountability and definitions of safety.

What Are Impacts to Providing Services Not Culturally Responsive to Underserved Communities?

Services that do not respond to survivors' contexts cannot truly serve survivors. Organizations, if developing programming without a culturally responsive lens and survivor input, may find:

- Services and programs are not effective as survivors cycle in and out of systems again and again – and are thus, inadequately served;
- Such services and programs may lead to community distrust and increase survivor isolation; and,
- Such services and programs may perpetuate trauma and oppression through renewed experiences of gender bias, racism, and/or discrimination.

All of these impacts create additional barriers to survivor and community safety.

What Steps can STOP Administrators Take to Increase Culturally Responsive Services and Reduce Institutional Bias?

STOP Administrators can foster environments that further culturally responsive services. For example, Administrators can counter institutional bias by:

- Breaking out the category of “other” or “underserved” to specific populations – and cultivating responses that work for each population;
- Fostering needs assessments from within communities of historically-oppressed survivors and designing activities, programs, priorities, and funding based on this input;
- Fostering ongoing trainings with staff and grantees on culturally responsive services by going beyond a single cultural competency session to recurring assessment of access, efficacy, impact, and promotion of models that support survivors and communities;
- Developing RFPs that support culturally-responsive services and increase funding for innovative programs, pilot projects, and intensive services that are culturally relevant;
- Incorporating cultural responsiveness and language access as a standard site visit process by checking materials, MOUs, referral processes; etc.; and,
- Supporting a trauma-informed, historically-rooted, anti-bias, social justice lens in fostering transformative services and programs that can support survivor and community safety.

The work of equitably serving ALL survivors and communities across a State/Territory can be daunting. In order to be successful in reaching and resourcing underserved populations, it matters for STOP Administrators to fund culturally responsive services, have meaningful engagement with underserved populations, and to intentionally seek out integrated approaches and innovative programming tailored to underserved survivors and communities. With a commitment to strengthening institutional services and practical actions toward

reducing bias and promoting integrated approaches and innovative programming, we can spur personal and institutional social justice and equality.