

Cultural Competence for Equity and Inclusion

Cultural competence for equity and inclusion is the ability to live and work effectively in culturally diverse environments and enact a commitment to fairness and to the full participation of all members. In environments that are equitable and inclusive, there is a fair distribution of resources and opportunities. People feel valued, feel a sense of belonging, and can fulfill their potential.

Cultural competence for equity and inclusion requires a range of awareness, knowledge, and skills. The five key components of this model are: 1) Self-awareness, 2) Understanding and valuing others, 3) Knowledge of societal inequities, 4) Skills to interact effectively with a diversity of people in different contexts, and 5) Skills to foster transformation towards equity and inclusion. Each of these components, and some of the competencies within them, will be discussed below.

1. Self-awareness.

Self-awareness is the consciousness of our social identities, cultures, biases, and perspectives. It entails the ability to understand who we are and what we bring to relationships and situations. There are numerous competencies to this component, including:

- Awareness of our social identities and their cultural influences and how they intersect.
- Awareness of our prejudices, stereotypes, and biases.
- Awareness of our internalized superiority and internalized inferiority--how we have internalized (often unconsciously) notions of the superiority of our dominant/privileged social identity groups (internalized dominance) and the inferiority of our subordinated/marginalized social identity groups (internalized oppression.)
- Awareness of how we may be perceived by others and the impact of our behavior.

2. Understanding and valuing others.

Not only is self-knowledge and awareness needed to enact cultural competence for equity and inclusion, so is knowledge and appreciation of the social identities, cultures, and worldviews of other people. Many of these competencies mirror the ones in self-awareness which include:

- Knowledge of the social identities of other people, their cultural influences, and how they intersect.
- Ability to value and appreciate ways of being, doing, and thinking other than our own.
- Ability to recognize how other people express internalized superiority and internalized inferiority.

3. Knowledge of societal inequities.

We cannot understand ourselves or other people, or create greater equity without considering the larger socio-political and historical context of which we are part. We need to have a grasp of different forms of privilege and oppression and how these they affect people's experiences and access to social power. It is also critical to appreciate the interlocking nature of different types of inequality. Some key competencies include:

- Knowledge of the history, ideology, and current manifestations of systemic inequalities and how they reinforce each other.

- Understanding of how different forms of oppression operate on interpersonal, cultural, institutional, and structural levels.
- Understanding of the impact of systemic inequalities on individuals' opportunities and lived realities.

4. Skills to interact effectively with a diversity of people in different contexts.

In addition to understanding self, others, and society, we need the ability to adapt to and work collaboratively with diverse people in a range of situations. People's social identities affect their interpersonal, communication and work styles, as well as their views of conflict, notions of leadership and sense of time (among many other things). Some competencies of this component of the model include the ability to:

- Embrace, integrate, and adapt to different cultural styles.
- Deal with conflict due to cultural differences and the dynamics of inequality.
- Engage in dialogue about social identities, diversity, and oppression issues.

5. Skills to foster transformation towards equity and inclusion.

Cultural competence for equity and inclusion requires more than just understanding the impact of social inequality. It entails being able to identify and address inequities and choose appropriate interventions to create environments, policies, and practices to ensure diversity and fairness. Competencies for creating change are needed at various levels such as skills for:

- Continual *self-development*, including for self-education, self-reflection, and personal change.
- Addressing *interpersonal and group* issues for example, responding to biased comments, addressing inequitable group dynamics, and creating culturally inclusive work and learning groups.
- Transforming *institutions* such as being able to create, critically analyze, implement or advocate for organizational norms, policies and practices that are equitable and inclusive.
- Creating *societal* change by being able to work collaboratively with others to foster social justice.

Developing cultural competency is an ongoing process; it is not an endpoint. We will have different degrees of competency in different components with different social identity groups. Depending on one's role and responsibilities, individuals may need particular competencies within each of the main components. The Cultural Competence for Equity and Inclusion model can help us navigate the path towards greater understanding, effectiveness, fairness, and full participation.