



“MESSAGE TO THE FIELD” **Themes and Tips**

At the close of the Alliance Cultural Competency Institute launch, Nov. 29 – Dec. 1, 2006 at the Citigroup Building in Long Island City, NY, participants offered these viewpoints when asked to write a “message to the field.” Most were unsigned; where names were signed, they are noted here. This tool gives an overview of the most prominent themes, and offers related tips for capacity builders to advance cultural competency.—Brigette Rouson, Program Director

THEMES:

- ***To support practice, a compelling case must first be made that capacity building is important, and then that cultural competency is essential for effective capacity building.***
- ***“Cultural competency is a journey, not a checklist.”***
- ***We all are cultural beings, so nonprofits must work toward cultural competency in order to fulfill their missions.***
- ***Addressing cultural competency means changing individual attitudes as well as structures and institutional practices.***
- ***Capacity builders must be prepared to facilitate this change.***
- ***Cultural competency means listening and supporting nonprofits in ways that makes sense for them—avoiding cultural dominance.***
- ***Type of geographic base— urban/suburban/rural—is an important cultural dimension that deserves attention in capacity building.***
- ***We can affirm and appreciate different worldviews we encounter, though it is impossible to know them all.***
- ***Learning communities enhance our cultural competency.***

TIPS:

- **Envision nonprofit organizations, initiatives or leaders as part of the whole sector and society, with a necessary role of advancing equity.**
- **Find ways to communicate the importance of capacity building work, and that cultural competency is imperative for nonprofits and those providing nonprofit support.**
- **Entering and during capacity building with nonprofits, take stock of one’s own biases and knowledge base, as well as structural means by**

which power inequities have been reinforced. Make it a part of your conversation and analysis from the start, even when cultural issues are not brought up explicitly.

- **Take action to move beyond limitations that you uncover in your practice and in the nonprofits you support. This action could be through: broader reading, connecting with colleagues to learn more and share the work; revamping materials/processes for training, grantmaking (application, review, reporting); new approaches teaching/research, different agreements or processes for reaching agreement, changes in nonprofit leadership and operations (hiring, staff development, partnering, planning, fundraising).**
- **Set a program of continuous learning and application. Identify, generate, and share resources widely—across genres, sectors, and cultural locations. Experiment with different approaches.**
- **Diversify your networks and take an active part in connecting with colleagues—building your own capacity as you build that of nonprofits you support.**
- **Engage in reflective practice, be clear about your goals for advancing in cultural competency, use some means of formally evaluating your work and being accountable.**

“During the CCI, the question was asked, ‘How can you incorporate cultural competence into the capacity building work you do with organizations?’ I would amend that question to read ‘How can you *not*?’

I believe that **helping organizations develop their capacity to fulfill their missions** and create positive change in the communities they serve **cannot be accomplished unless and until they develop their capacity to look at the biases they hold as individuals, examine the organizational structures that support power inequities, and engage the community and all of the voices** there within to inform the work they do **at every level**. Cultural competence is not just another pillar of organizational infrastructure operating in isolation.

It must be thought of and treated like blood in the human body, flowing through and nourishing every artery, vein and organ in the system.”

- Jamie Morgan, Community Resource Center (Denver)

“Community-based human service nonprofit organizations currently serve as part of a safety net for poor and disenfranchised people at the same time the gap between the rich and poor is getting wider and poor communities are screaming out for change in the quality of their lives.

It is for this reason that I think that nonprofit organizations must meet the needs of our times by moving beyond simply providing a service and move back to organizing communities for change and self-determination.

We (consultants) in the capacity-building field should facilitate this change within the nonprofit sector.”

“Increase marketing of importance of capacity building.

- 1) Identify target audiences, such as Boards, E.D.s, program leaders, and various cultures!
 - 2) Articulate a dramatic compelling case why C.B. [capacity building] is worthwhile
 - a) leverage point
 - b) before and after
 - 3) Identify diverse communication channels to get the word out
 - 4) Emphasize key importance of leadership.”
-

“Please remember that there are cultural divides beyond race, gender, religion—urban/suburban/rural culture issues in particular are an interest of mine.”

“One of the key learnings for me is that cultural competency is a journey, not a checklist. The more I learn, the more I discover ways of incorporating cultural competency into our trainings. One small example is that I am currently accepting applications for enrollment into our Future Leaders Initiative orally for those [for] whom English is not their first language. I would not have thought of that had it not been for the CCI.”

- Cynthia Winter, Neighborhood Partnership Fund (Portland, OR)

“Dear Capacity Building Field:

I’m still not convinced that the argument has been made convincingly that cultural competency is essential for effective capacity building.

How can you successfully convince a Board of middle-class folks, committed to the organization’s mission that they need to become more culturally competent when, in their communities, what they are doing is working just fine?

‘Families are getting housed, volunteers are assisting, funds are being raised—what’s the problem? Isn’t capacity building all about just doing what is working better?’ This is not stating my own opinion, but rather giving the voice to the anticipated opposition [we may] encounter from the field. My dream is to get to

the point where they say, 'How can we NOT consider cultural competency when we are doing capacity building?'"

- Stuart Barnes Jamieson, Habitat for Humanity (Chicago)

"Keep up the good work—it is an uphill struggle and the non-profit/social sector are the leaders. This will only happen in our society if we keep the work moving."

"Listen to the needs of others intently and do not prioritize others' needs based on what you think the most urgent needs are. Support others in ways they want to be supported not in ways you perceive they want support."

When a difference of opinion arises, explore the values each opinion is based on all participants. Validate the relevance of differences. Discourage the manifestation of one culture's dominance over others."

"Cultural competence is not optional because we're dealing with people, who are cultural beings. To work with humans is to encounter culture; to work effectively with humans is to embrace and engage culture—to insure that everyone can contribute (which will make for better, stronger organizations and communities)."

"To the Field:
Be real!
Know ourselves
 yourselves
And consider
 what you find, then
Visualize,
Actualize,
Rise!"

"Random thoughts:
This work is like an onion—each layer reveals a new layer to peel away. The first layer is to know ourselves and to identify the lens in which we view the world. The second layer is to recognize that others, too, have their lens and worldview. While we cannot hope to "know" all those other worldviews, we can acknowledge, affirm and appreciate them.

Ultimately, **we can never arrive**; we only create the journey. For capacity building, we must find ways to go beyond 'training' to approach integration of **inclusiveness** in terms of individuals, groups, communities and society. This **has to include changes in structure, process, procedures, policies and politics.**"

"How can you examine and challenge your cultural biases to help your clients do the same and in turn advance their missions?"

"It's imperative that organizations recognize and take ownership for their own level of cultural competency.

While we cannot force them to be culturally competent, their inability to deliver 'quality' services results in 'waste of precious funds' and communities with unmet needs.

Perhaps, training in areas of assessment in tandem with cultural competence can help (enlighten) them to move to the next level."

"My message to the field of capacity building on my knowledge of cultural competency:

If you haven't already:

Research, based on best practices in the field. What are the core values that can help lead to the development of guiding premises and principles of working with a cultural competency approach in the field of capacity building.

Maybe using the Family Support Principles (Family Support America) as an example or guide in how to make principles more concrete."

- Magdalena Benitez, Strategies (Camarillo, CA)

"The only way to create a different world, a more socially equitable society, is through change. **When we recognize that change is necessarily structural, as including institutional hierarchies and who makes decisions as well as cultural assumptions and the norms we perpetuate and internalize, then we are also talking about changing ourselves.**

Ourselves as individuals, as organizations and as the sectors and movements we are part [of]. Funders should, must do this work themselves and within their foundations and also support this work in the fields in which they fund.

Cultural competency is a practice that promotes change and will help us reach the just outcomes which motivate our work.”

- Kolu Zigbi, Jessie Smith Noyes Foundation (New York)

“Let’s continue to break down our isolation and come together in supportive learning communities—virtual, real and otherwise.”