

**ANTI-RACISM INITIATIVE
COMMUNITY HUMAN SERVICES DEPARTMENT
FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS
As of 12-05-2005**

These frequently asked questions and responses are intended to offer supervisors ways to respond to tough questions. None of the responses is a substitute for thinking through these questions yourselves, or for having discussions with your peers or supervisor to come up with answers with which you are comfortable. We hope these responses will be helpful to you as you help us move the anti-racism work forward in the Department. The questions are ones asked at Leadership Group meetings in November, 2004.

1. Are we lowering our hiring standards to increase our staff of color?
 - No, we have not and will not lower our hiring standards to increase the number of staff of color.
 - All staff hired into vacant positions must first meet minimum qualifications and then go through a competitive selection process.
 - However, there are some things that we are starting to do differently in the selection process itself. An example is recruiting differently so that potential employees in all communities within the County know of our vacancies.
 - We also continue to evaluate how our hiring process works. This might mean changing the questions we ask, thinking through skills that are needed, and coming up with hiring criteria that will bring in those individuals who are best equipped to serve our clients due to changing demographics.

2. Is there any future in promotions for white people?
 - Yes. Data shows that about 38% of our hires are people of color, that means 62% are white. Close to the same proportions are true for promotions.
 - We're interested in hiring the very best people regardless of their race.
 - It's both untrue and unfair to assume that people of color are being promoted because of their race. But even worse, it's disrespectful and hurtful. Are people who make this assumption asking the same question when staff from the majority culture are promoted?

3. Why should our staff makeup reflect that of our clients? To do so suggests that people can't effectively serve people of a different race.
 - Research data is inconclusive as to whether a racial match between worker and client results in a better outcome.
 - Anecdotally, clients report feeling more comfortable with a worker that "looks like them" and thus they are able to form a helping relationship more quickly.

- Workers of the same race/ethnicity as the client are more able to understand that client's culture and more easily work with that client in the context of their culture.
 - In some areas of the Department, this has led to the use of culturally sensitive positions. There is no general Department position to move us in that direction; use of such positions is on a case-by-case basis.
 - Even if all caseloads are mixed, it is a benefit to have a diverse unit to help each other learn about and better understand other races/cultures and to have more cultural expertise in developing case plans and other services.
4. What are the criteria for hiring now? At one point we had to prove percent of caseload to justify a culturally sensitive posting. At other points we could justify a posting based on community and client representation and staff enrichment. Where does it stand now?
- Updated criteria for posting a position as culturally sensitive have been developed. All HR Generalists have a copy if you are interested in reviewing the criteria.
5. Is management saying that we're currently doing a lousy job?
- No. We are saying that we have evidence that in some areas our systems aren't working as well for people of color.
 - We have to look at our procedures and the assumptions that are built into our systems and figure out how they might be contributing to our disparate outcomes.
 - We also have to acknowledge that we're all part of those systems, so we all have a responsibility to make them better.
 - And finally, our community is changing so we each need to increase our competency in dealing with the needs of our clients.
6. We've tried lots of diversity initiatives and they all fade away. What's different this time?
- Previous diversity efforts, including those of the last couple years, have laid important groundwork for our current work.
 - For the current initiative, we have Board and County Manager support.
 - a. One of the Board's goals is to address changing demographics in the County. Our work is part of that goal.
 - b. We've held a workshop with the Board at which members were very supportive in their comments.
 - c. The Board in November, 2004, approved a contract for training of all CHS staff on anti-racism.
 - This is a long-term effort, built around an Anti-Racism Leadership Team that will direct it.
 - Our Department Head, Division Directors, and Managers are actively involved.
 - We are taking an institutional, as well as individual, approach to racism.

- We are investing the time and resources (e.g. training, consulting help) needed to make this initiative successful.
- Ultimately, what will make the difference is the effort from managers and supervisors with the leadership that you can bring to this issue.
- We are being realistic about the things that we can accomplish, and a timeline that emphasizes long-term institutional change. This means we will be doing this work for many years. (Our consultants tell us 20-30.) So, we have to form a structure that can sustain itself over time, and across generations of leaders to come in Human Services.

7. What about diversity other than race, e.g. Gay Lesbian Bisexual and Transgender issues? Blatant and sometimes legal limitations have been and are continuing to be placed on members of the GLBT community. Though anti-racism work is valuable, why does this work rise above work in an area where human rights are so obviously being violated?

- GLBT cultural issues are important. Focusing on racism & cultural bias at this time allows us to focus our energy and efforts; including all areas of discrimination at this time would probably overwhelm us.
- We realize that individuals and groups struggle with prejudice and bias that isn't based on race. Our ultimate goal is a workplace and community that supports all people, regardless of their race, culture, sexual orientation, religion or age.
- We're learning skills and lessons that will help us address additional areas of concern. We want to know about and address discriminatory behavior and practices as we learn about them.
- We will continue in this Initiative - and in other parts of our work - to do all we can to ensure a respectful workplace for all of our employees.

8. It sounds like we have to walk on eggshells, that we all have to be politically correct. What happens if I make a mistake, for example, by saying the wrong thing? Will I be punished/disciplined?

- Mistakes are a part of learning, and all of us make them, including the Department and Division Directors.
- When mistakes happen, the expectation is that there be awareness and learning from them, and that we take actions to do better next time.
- There is no intention of punishing or disciplining anyone.
- Also, this work isn't about being politically correct. It's about meeting the Department's mission for all residents of the County.

9. Are you telling me what I have to believe, about what my personal values should be to work here?

- Nobody can tell you what to think or believe. But as an organization we can define what is acceptable workplace behavior. Each person's beliefs and values are their own -- however, we can and do expect respectful workplace behavior.

- The focus in talking about these issues is on how they impact the way we treat our clients and each other.
 - Racial discrimination in the workplace is against the law. Beyond that, our goal is to have a respectful, welcoming workplace where everyone feels welcomed and their work is valued.
 - As leaders (supervisors, managers, directors), we all occasionally must carry out initiatives or directives about which we are uncertain or perhaps don't fully support – but we're still expected to be positive; leaders don't undermine the work of the Department.
10. Doesn't all the energy and resources devoted to this issue drain energy and resources from real work on our mission?
- This work is part of the real work of our mission and will help us get better at addressing the parts of our mission that we aren't addressing or addressing adequately.
 - The demographics of Ramsey County have changed, and we need to learn how to better respond to the needs of those who live in the County. That is entirely consistent with our mission.
11. Are you saying we are all racists?
- No. Concern about this question is why we are sponsoring training initially for all supervisors, and then for all staff, about the Anti-Racism Initiative.
 - We all have racial prejudices or biases. By itself, this doesn't make any of us racists.
 - What we are working on is eliminating institutional racism.
 - This will become clearer as staff attend training.
12. What are you asking me to do?
- Be open-minded and willing to learn about this initiative.
 - Be authentic in our discussions.
 - Don't take this information personally—no one is saying that you are racist.
 - Talk with your supervisor or manager if you have any concerns.
 - Be respectful of all CHS employees and clients.
13. What does it mean to be “authentic” in discussions?
- Being “authentic” means being honest and putting issues on the table.
 - Authentic discussions don't pretend that a major issue (i.e. the elephant in the middle of the room) doesn't exist.
 - Authenticity means respectfully expressing your interest, questions and views; engaging in genuine conversation to resolve issues.
 - Authenticity also means acting in ways that are consistently principled – people can rely on you to act this way. You keep promises and do what you say you will do.

- We are trying to equip leaders to have authentic discussions, e.g. with the Why document, these Questions and Answers, and Dismantling Racism training.
14. What is the timeline and/or strategy for dissemination of this information to line staff? More information is needed for line staff so questions or doubts won't come up as quickly. Why are things so secretive?
- There is no attempt to be secretive. Under different titles, this initiative has been underway for a couple years.
 - The manner in which we are currently disseminating information is to first provide supervisors with the tools to have effective conversations with staff. We have learned from doing this work the past couple of years, that the way in which we introduce, prepare, and give out materials matters.
 - Some are able to have conversations now and others may not have had enough exposure to these issues to effectively share the Why document and answer the questions that will likely arise. Individual staff and supervisors are in different places on this topic. Our experience is that conversations about race can be very difficult and emotion-filled and that leaders need to be well prepared.
 - Talk with your manager about when and how you should share information with staff.
15. What do we say to white clients who don't want a person of color as the person working with them?
- It may be helpful to emphasize that the staff person who is a person of color is the person that has the qualifications, ability, and work assignment to work with the client.
 - One could also tell them the same thing that we are telling our staff – that the community is changing and so is the county workforce.
 - Just as we expect all of our staff to work respectfully with all of our clients, we expect the same of our clients.
 - A staff person of color who is being discriminated against because of racial prejudice from a client can refuse to be in a situation where s/he is being abused or mistreated.
 - It is important to support and validate the staff person's feelings in this type of situation as real and legitimate.
16. How do persons of a different culture learn about "white culture" in order to effectively provide service?
- We're concerned about all forms of prejudice and bias and realize that individuals and groups struggle with discrimination that isn't based on race. Our ultimate goal is a workplace and community that supports all, regardless of their race, culture, sexual orientation, religion or age.
 - For each person, there are different learning styles and approaches that would work in learning about "white culture". Some of this happens through dialogue, reading, life experiences, training, reflection, and personal work situations where we are exposed to people who are very

different from us. Resources can be identified through the Training and Development and through the County Diversity Office.

- New immigrants, people of color and European Americans all struggle to understand white culture. The learning's will be as varied as the people you ask. This is where dialogue becomes extremely important. Finding cultural mentors to assist you in asking questions of yourself will also be important. Keep in mind that learning is a journey, not a destination.
- Intercultural competence is a skill, just like other skills that can be learned.

17. Will Dismantling Racism training be offered to more staff (line staff), so the common language is more widely understood as well as the premise of the effort? If so, when?

- The County Board has approved a contract so that we will be able to provide Dismantling Racism to all staff during 2005.

18. Why is this an "initiative"? Shouldn't this be a permanent part of our work?

- It is currently called an "initiative" to draw attention to it, to let supervisors and line staff know that this is a top priority. The use of the word "initiative" is not intended to imply that it isn't and won't be internalized. Much of the work on the initiative is aimed at changing systems so that it is internalized.
- Part of moving forward with the anti-racism work is starting to imbed the very issues that are brought up here so that we can institutionalize anti-racism as the way we work in CHS.

19. How will success be measured, especially in the area of workplace? How will the baseline be set?

The answer has not yet been fully developed but here is some of the current thinking.

- Identification and narrowing of service disparities.
- More awareness and competency in how we deliver services.
- Expanded and more responsive contracted vendors; more diversity in the services that are offered through vendors; perhaps measured through meeting of standards created by the federal government.
- The hiring and retention of more diverse staff.
- Some measurement may be of how we do our work as well as what is accomplished.

20. How will active leadership be measured/monitored? We are not all in the same place.

- One measure is the current Leadership Feedback Process that contains a question regarding diversity and cultural responsiveness.
- A self-assessment tool developed by the Leadership Development Action Team gives leaders an opportunity to reflect about how they are leading this effort and what next steps they need to take. In this process, a

performance appraisal factor has been developed that can be used during the appraisal process to see how supervisors are taking leadership.

- A tool called the IDI, available through the Office of Diversity Programs, is another option to identify areas where more learning may be helpful in terms of both thinking about and behaving in a more culturally competent manner.
- Some of these tools may be used by managers who are responsible for monitoring leadership on this issue by supervisors.

21. One of the areas identified as a disparity is service to seniors. Is it possible to increase outreach to our elderly who are persons of color?

- Yes. The Service Team for Elderly and Adult Services is developing an action plan that includes identifying the kind of outreach needed.
- This is an example of work being done throughout the Service Teams.

22. Racism in the Work Place – If a staff person treats someone from another country/ culture disrespectfully (and it's reported to supervisor) shouldn't some type of discipline be given to that worker? It appears that even if some type of discipline is given, the same worker continues to be disrespectful to persons from different cultures. It doesn't appear staff persons are learning from their mistakes. How can this be changed?

- Discipline is one of the options but not the first option for this or other work performance issues.
- Training and setting expectations comes first. The Dismantling Racism training that will be provided to all staff will be helpful in this regard.
- Depending on the incident of disrespect, a next step may be a workplan designed to address a performance issue.
- Continued incidents and/or failure to follow a workplan may lead to the progressive discipline track, starting with an oral reprimand. Then if there are further problems, a written reprimand, potentially followed by suspension for further problems.
- Department leadership holds the expectation that supervisors will hold workers accountable for performance in this area.

23. Have you consulted fully with leaders in the GLBT community regarding your decision to exclude homophobia from our effort to dismantle racism?

- This Initiative was developed in-house – both in the County and in the Department. Consultation with any part of the community was not part of the development.

24. We're depending on the training from the Minnesota Collaborative Anti-Racism Initiative from James Addington & Carmen Valenzuela. Is there a back-up plan?

- The MCARI training is simply a starting point.

- One important value that MCARI trainers bring to us is their unique approach to helping us understand institutional racism in a way that promotes constructive dialogue and minimizes defensiveness.
 - We have entered into a contract with MCARI and fully expect that James and Carmen will lead the training through 2005.
 - We have and continue to develop internal resources that we can call on should we need to do so.
25. Why are only 2 of the 26 membership slots on the Anti-Racism Leadership Team expected to be supervisors when there are about 80 supervisors? Doesn't that under-value supervisor involvement?
- Ideally, more supervisors could be included in the formal leadership of this Initiative. But two of 26 is roughly proportional to supervisors' percentage of overall staff.
 - One goal in creating the new Team is to get input, participation and buy-in from all levels of staff in CHS, so emphasis is being placed on including a significant number of line staff. About 16 of the 26 members will be line-staff.
 - This make-up also reflects a commitment to "transformational leadership" in the Initiative. To sustain the work over the long run, we are imbedding leadership throughout the department.
 - The membership slots reflect our best attempt to balance many different characteristics including job duties, race, age, experience, level of authority, gender and more.
26. Why is Monty Martin (CHS Director) having the Department do this work?
- The work is the whole Department's not just Monty's.
 - Department leadership believes that this work is essential to meet the Department's mission.
 - We believe there is a strong "business case" for the work – that the Department is charged with effectively serving all those who live in our County – and that we have evidence that we don't do well in serving some residents of color with some services.
 - We believe the racial and cultural makeup of the County will continue to change and that CHS must change with it – to attract and retain a high quality workforce as well as to meet resident needs.
 - We believe that CHS will make better decisions, provide better services and offer a more respectful workplace if we address institutional racism – this is both a "business case" and an ethical position.
27. Is the rest of the County going to do this work?
- The Board and the County Manager have directed County agencies to address changing internal and external County demographics.
 - The Model Employer Initiative Leadership Group and the Human Resources Department have developed a plan, for Board approval, to address the internal changing demographics of Ramsey County.
 - Currently we are the only department that has identified disparities that necessitate the need for anti racism work, making us the only department

in the organization doing diversity work through an anti-racism initiative. Anti-racism is being considered for the whole organization in the near future.

- The County has been successful at spearheading efforts to address issues as they relate to diversity, culture and race department by department. The innovative diversity efforts of individual departments assist the overall organization in developing a foundation and framework for organization wide anti-racism work in the future. In the meantime the work we do in Human Services will assist the County as a whole in moving forward in the future.