UIC Solutions Suite Webinar Series
Transcript for how-to webinar on Cultural Competency Guidebook
Recorded by Jessica Jonikas

Slide 1 (announcer):

Thank you for visiting the University of Illinois at Chicago's Health & Recovery Solutions Suite. The following recording comes to you from the UIC Center on Integrated Health Care and Self-Directed Recovery. Visit our online Solutions Suite to obtain free tools that promote health, self-direction, and employment for the behavioral health field.

Slide 2:

Hello. My name is Jessica Jonikas. I am the Associate Director of the University of Illinois at Chicago's Center on Integrated Health Care and Self-Directed Recovery. Our Center offers an online Solutions Suite, containing free tools for the behavioral health field. These tools promote wellness, self-direction, and employment for people who are recovering from mental illnesses. You can visit our Solutions Suite on the web site where you found this webinar, at www.center4healthandsdc.org. Today, I'll be discussing how to implement one of the tools found in our Solutions Suite, called the *Cultural Competency Guidebook*. Our Center developed this tool in partnership with the STAR Center, which is a National Technical Assistance Center funded by SAMHSA.

Slide 3:

Our guidebook and the UIC Solutions Suite are jointly funded by two federal agencies. First is the National Institute on Disability, Independent Living, and Rehabilitation Research, of the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Administration for Community Living. Second is the Center for Mental Health Services of the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration. The work of the Center does not necessarily represent the policy of any agency or endorsement by the federal government.

Slide 4:

We developed our *Cultural Competency Guidebook* to help both peer-run and community-based mental health programs to assess their cultural competency in five organizational areas. Throughout this webinar, I'll be reviewing each of the organizational areas and how to assess them. Our guidebook also outlines how to create action plans to better serve people from diverse groups. It's been used by peer-run and self-help programs, psychiatric rehabilitation programs, community mental health centers, drop-in centers, and community clinics. Users have found the guidebook to be both practical and encouraging, thereby enabling them to set organizational goals that could be achieved within a reasonable timeframe.

Slide 5:

Before I review how this tool works, I'd like to clarify a few key concepts. First, we use the term "cultural diversity" to refer to the unique characteristics that we all possess. These characteristics distinguish us as individuals. They also identify us as belonging to various groups. People belong to many different groups that contribute to their identities. We believe that diversity enriches personhood and community, embracing ethnicity, socio-economic status, gender identity, sexual orientation, age, family identity, religion, immigration status, mental health, and physical ability.

Slide 6:

The second term I want to clarify is that of "cultural competency." By this, we mean the ability to interact effectively and comfortably with diverse people. It involves four different aspects. The first is becoming aware of your own beliefs, prejudices, and discriminatory behavior. Second is changing your beliefs and attitudes, as needed, about people who differ from you in terms of ethnicity, culture, gender identity, sexual orientation, religion, mental health, ability, and other characteristics. Third is gaining knowledge about beliefs and practices among diverse groups. And fourth is developing communication skills to interact sensitively with individuals who belong to groups that aren't familiar to you.

Slide 7:

The third term I want to clarify is that of "dynamics of difference." This phrase refers to the power imbalances that influence interactions between people of different cultures or characteristics. Culturally competent individuals understand the impact that power imbalances have when people from more advantaged groups interact with those from less advantaged groups. They recognize that power imbalances can create misperceptions, distrust, and misunderstandings. They respond to these dynamics of difference by being open to changing their behaviors, based on constructive feedback from diverse people. Culturally competent programs respect the dynamics of difference by adapting their services to help diverse groups feel a sense of belonging and acceptance. The main take-away point here is to be aware that there are power dynamics when one group benefits from a privilege – even an historical or unsought privilege – that another group does not have equal access to.

Slide 8:

The final phrase used in our guidebook that warrants explanation is "most prevalent cultural group." This refers to the most common cultural groups in your local community, in addition to white English-speaking individuals. Later, I'll discuss how to use the U.S. Census Bureau's web site to discover the most prevalent groups in your city, town, county, or zip code area.

Slide 9:

Our guide addresses five organizational areas that are the focus of any comprehensive inclusion initiative. First is your program's Administration, Policies, and Guidelines. Second is your program's Providers and Staff, which include traditional providers, peer specialists, self-help group leaders, administrators, and your leadership. The third focal area is your program's

Services and Supports. The fourth area is your Program or Group Environment. And, finally, the guide addresses your Communication and Language Capacities.

Slide 10:

Our guidebook offers a common set of tasks within each these 5 organizational areas. The first is a discussion of why the organizational area is important, in terms of cultural competency and the dynamics of difference. Second is guidance about where to look within your program for signs that you're either culturally competent or that you need some work to get there. Third, you'll rate your program on how well it meets diversity criteria. Finally, you'll consider and act on ways to improve your program's competency in each of the five areas. We also provide tips and examples from real programs to help you immediately take the next steps towards your diversity inclusion goals.

Slide 11:

It works best to establish and resource a Diversity Committee to complete the cultural competency assessment, and to bring the results back to leadership. Already-existing committees can also be tasked with doing the assessment and the report-back. We encourage programs to do what will work best for them, within the following parameters. First, there should be more than one person tasked with this work. In other words, it should be modeled as an effort of the entire program or agency, rather than of an isolated person or committee. Second, people from diverse groups must be included on the Committee and be assigned key roles in the process. It is important that the program or agency commit to acting on the findings, even before the assessment begins. This includes a willingness to dedicate financial and other resources to the development of a solid cultural competency action plan.

Slide 12:

It's important to remember that people usually have strong feelings about culture, immigration, gender identity, sexual orientation, religion, and ability. Most people also have strong feelings about systematic and institutional oppression. We've found that the best ways to work with these strong feelings is to exhibit humility, patience, and the willingness to listen and to change.

Slide 13:

We recognize that it can be difficult for all of us to let go of ideas we have about our own cultural experiences, and what we feel is our own lack of prejudice. However, it's necessary to bracket these ideas, in order to open our minds and become good listeners. As experts suggest, we must put aside what we think we know, in order to learn the things that we don't know. We learn best when we ask questions and listen closely to the answers, before acting.

Slide 14:

With all of this in mind, let's take a look now at how the assessment works in each of the five organizational areas.

Slide 15:

The first focal area is a program's Administration, Policies, and Guidelines. Program policies, guidelines, and procedures matter in any diversity effort because they form the structure for managing the dynamics of difference. Taking a close look at whether and how your structure supports cultural competency signals to everyone in the organization that inclusion matters. It's one way you can be transparent about your intention to ensure diverse people will be treated with respect, and that their various needs will be met. We recommend identifying several diversity champions among your leadership. These champions must be willing to publicly support the efforts of the Diversity Committee. They also should be able to speak to leadership about how and why managing the dynamics of difference is also good business practice.

Slide 16:

We recommend assessing several indicators at the Administrative level to determine whether and how your structure is set up to be inclusive. For each one, we suggest how you will know if it's indicative of inclusivity and cultural competency. For example, we recommend that you review your mission statement to see if it expresses a clear commitment to serving diverse groups. As another example, we recommend reviewing your grievance procedures to ensure that they are sensitive to diverse communication needs and norms. In this organizational area, you'll also review your program's policies, rules of conduct, procedures for gathering feedback, and your funding line for diversity activities. To get the most robust result, we recommend employing leaders from diverse groups to help you examine your structure and policies. These individuals should be members of the diverse groups you serve or support. They also should have cultural competency expertise.

Slide 17:

After assessing the recommended indicators, our guide provides a rating system for you to denote how well your administrative structure encourages inclusivity, and manages the dynamics of difference. The rating goes from a low of 1 to a high of 4. To rate as a 4 in this area, a program will have a mission statement and policies that specifically address inclusion. It will have a Diversity Committee and dedicated funding for cultural competency activities. The program also will have identified the most prevalent cultural groups in the local area, developed guidelines to encourage culturally competent interactions, and created a strategic plan that includes diversity goals. A program with a 4-star rating also will have implemented a process to regularly gather feedback from program stakeholders about its diversity inclusion efforts. Based on a program's rating, we outline suggestions for next steps, either to begin moving towards a higher rating in this area, or to maintain a high rating if one was achieved.

Slide 18:

Next we provide strategies that were used by peer-run programs in a pilot-test we conducted to assess the utility of our assessment tool. I'll talk about this pilot-test later in the webinar. One strategy is to hold a special staff retreat to review and revise your mission statement and policies for inclusiveness of diversity. Another is to change your time-off policy to allow staff to choose

the holidays they wish to take off, rather than pre-determining them based on the dominate culture's holidays. Finally, one program included an anonymous survey in their newsletter to gather a wider range of ideas and input about their own cultural competency.

Slide 19:

The second organizational area you'll be assessing is your Staffing or Providers. This area includes traditional, peer, and self-help providers, along with your leadership. The fundamental principal in this organizational area is that the people who serve your clients, and their managers, are most effective when they're able to work well with diverse people. This competency is seen largely in how providers communicate with others, and whether they're able to accept differing beliefs and worldviews. This stance is not always easy to achieve, especially if we feel that someone's beliefs challenge our own. Yet, to provide the best services and supports, we must demonstrate a willingness to tolerate how others see the world and their own circumstances. An important take-away message in this area is that we *all* have something to learn about other people's cultures, identities, and worldviews, even if we belong to a traditionally-underrepresented group.

Slide 20:

We recommend several indicators for assessing the cultural competency of your staff, providers, and leadership. For example, we suggest that you determine whether or not staff reflects the most prevalent cultural groups in your local area. As another example, we suggest reviewing whether or not cultural competencies are included in your annual performance rating system. Related to this, we suggest that personnel files document attendance at multicultural trainings for each member of the staff. When assessing this organizational area, we also recommend that you conduct ongoing observations of interactions between staff and clients or peers. This will help you to ensure that staff are using culturally appropriate communication strategies. I'll talk more about communication and language later in this webinar.

Slide 21:

After assessing the recommended indicators, you'll use the rating system to determine the cultural competency of your providers and leadership. To rate a high of 4 in this area, a program will have procedures for recruiting and retaining diverse staff, will include cultural competency in annual performance reviews, and will offer a coordinated diversity training program. Programs with higher ratings also hold regular meetings across staffing and leadership about promoting cultural competency.

Slide 22:

One of the strategies shared by our pilot-test programs was to host an annual Culture Day, when everyone brought in food, books, and movies that represented their cultures or worldviews. Other programs encouraged staff to regularly attend multicultural events in the area, which also turned out to be a great way to build new relationships in untapped communities. Other programs started book or movie clubs to learn more about diversity through fiction, non-fiction, and

documentaries. These are all ways to make learning about diversity more enjoyable and relaxed, rather than as something that feels forced or somehow contentious.

Slide 23:

The third organizational area you'll be assessing with our guidebook is comprised of the Services and Supports you're providing. The philosophy driving this part of the assessment is that services and supports are enhanced by tailoring them to recipients' personal characteristics, worldviews, traditions, and customs. There is a body of evidence to suggest that people engage better in services that reflect their cultures and beliefs. It's also been shown that people benefit when their desire to use indigenous healing practices -- such as acupuncture, herbal remedies, or yoga – as part of their health or mental health treatment is respected. In other cultures, it's important to include family members in services and supports, as is comfortable for the recipient.

Slide 24:

Within this area, it's important to remember that there are vast cultural differences in how people define and respond to mental health and substance use disorders. In some cultures, emotional distress is not viewed as an illness or a chemical imbalance, but as a spiritual crisis. In others, certain types of experiences, such as mania, are viewed more positively as a sign of a person's ability to communicate with divine spirits. Sometimes, people from the same culture view mental health very differently, depending on how much they've come to accept Westernized views, values, and ideas. This process of acceptance is called "acculturation" and it should be carefully considered by programs that serve people who have immigrated to the United States.

Slide 25:

We recommend assessing several indicators to assess the cultural competency of your services and supports. As one example, we recommend reviewing the degree to which your services and supports incorporate diverse beliefs about mental health. As another example, we recommend determining the number of partnerships you have with diverse organizations within your community. We also recommend that you assess whether your membership and staffing reflect the prevalent cultural groups in your community. After reviewing your services and supports, you'll once again rate whether or not your program is meeting these indicators.

Slide 26:

To improve in this area, one of our pilot-test programs started an art class for peers and providers. The class served the dual purpose of showcasing art from across cultures, and offering time for people to create personal art depicting their traditions and heritage. Another program began offering a group on grief and loss, after it started ongoing discussions about diversity in its program. It became clear that many people had unresolved trauma from feeling as though they had to give up their heritage to fit into American society, while others felt rejected by their cultural groups due to their mental health struggles. For some, anger, grief, and trauma will need to be resolved before cultural celebrations can begin. Another program that was offering free toiletries, hair care, and cosmetic kits to its membership, broadened the selection to include

products used by people from various cultures. There are many unique ways to be culturally competent and to help people feel welcome and represented in your program.

Slide 27:

The fourth organizational area you'll be assessing is your Program's or Group's Physical Environment. This area refers to whether or not acceptance of diversity is communicated by your program's physical space. Employees and clients or peers will feel more welcome when they see people who look like them in the posters, paintings, or other artwork in your public spaces. Similarly, reading materials and brochures with pictures of diverse people, and in the main languages of your community, convey such acceptance. Playing world music and offering refreshments from various cultures at your celebrations also help people feel more at home. Accessibility of your building to people with physical disabilities also communicates acceptance of all people who need your services. To improve your rating in this area, we suggest stepping back and thinking about how your program feels to diverse people walking in the door for the first time. Do they see indications right away that they're welcome and can get culturally competent help?

Slide 28:

To improve their physical environment, one of our pilot programs designated a large blank wall for staff and members to hang pictures of multicultural people, women, LGBTQ+ individuals, older and younger people, those with physical disabilities, and famous people with mental health conditions from diverse cultures. In this way, everyone in the program contributed to creating a large collage reflecting their commitment to diversity. Another program that couldn't afford new artwork asked its staff and members to loan them multicultural posters or paintings that were then hung in public spaces on a rotating basis. Finally, another program that was located in a community representing many different cultures hung a map of the world in the lobby. They invited their staff, members, and visitors to pin their countries of origin. This map reflected the fact that America is home to people from all corners of the world.

Slide 29:

The final organizational area you'll be assessing is comprised of Communication and Language Capacities. One key indicator is employing staff who speak the prevalent languages used in your surrounding communities. Competency in this area also means that your staff can match their verbal and nonverbal cues to the cultural norms of their clients and colleagues. A major dynamic of difference in this area is understanding the historic distrust that arises when people from dominate cultures appear unaware of how others can be marginalized by language. This can be a contentious issue, with some believing that our society has become overly-sensitive about certain forms of speech or terminology. Yet, we know that words can hurt and words can marginalize, and being aware of this is an important part of cultural competency. Another indicator in this area is awareness that many people who use public services have trouble reading or writing in their native languages. This means that translating materials alone may not be enough, and that people may need other kinds of communication support. Finally, competency in this area also

involves accommodating people with communication disabilities who wish to join your program, as well as those who are blind or visually impaired, or deaf or hearing impaired.

Slide 30:

Programs that receive the highest rating in this area employ staff who understand cultural norms for communication. Programs with a 4-star rating also employ staff who speak different languages, and they've translated key materials, voicemail greetings, and web site information into the languages of their most prevalent cultural groups. They also are sensitive to inclusive language, including for those who are gender non-conforming, transgender, lesbian, gay or bisexual.

Slide 31:

To improve their language capacity, one of our pilot programs reached out to diverse community leaders to invite peers to offer a support group at the agency in their preferred language. This was one way to bridge the language gap represented on their staff, as they sought to find more bilingual providers. Another program worked with a local church and a synagogue to find peers to offer support groups there, helping to embed peer support into the community. Finally, another of the programs partnered with a local disability advocacy organization to offer hot and warm lines to people in mental health recovery who also were deaf or hearing impaired.

Slide 32:

With ratings in all five organizational areas complete, you're ready to report the results back to leadership and the larger program. We recommend that programs take time to digest and discuss their results before making an action plan. Some questions that will guide your discussions include the following.

What are things we can be most proud of?
What will be most challenging for us to address?
In what areas can we apply current resources to make the biggest improvements?

We've found that discussing these kinds of questions with leadership, providers, and clients or peers provides useful information to jump-start action planning. It's a way to find common ground for something that everyone wants to work on for the most immediate impact.

Slide 33:

If your program is feeling overwhelmed, it's helpful to remember that this is not uncommon. Our guide provides a list of nearly universal challenges in developing cultural competency, such as feeling that there isn't enough time or money, or losing momentum over time.

Slide 34:

You'll also find a template in our guidebook for developing a Diversity Action Plan. The Plan includes space for the focus area being addressed, the action steps to be taken, who will be responsible for implementing the action steps, and target dates for completion. We also provide a sample Diversity Survey that can be administered to your staff and clients or peers to assess how

well your program is meeting its diversity goals. This Survey includes questions such as whether the staff reflects diversity, whether there's a diversity committee, and whether the program is partnering with diverse community groups. We also offer a list of resources to help inform your diversity goals.

Slide 35:

Finally, to help you determine the most prevalent cultural groups in your community, we provide an overview of how to use the U.S. Census Bureau's web site to garner this information. When visiting their web site, you will enter the name of your city, county, town, or your zip code. You will be taken to a page that provides detailed information about the ethnicity, gender, and age of the people living in your community. You can compare this information to what you know about your own program. Do the people you serve reflect your larger community? What about your staff, do they? This is very useful information as you think about your diversity inclusion goals.

Slide 36:

Before we end today, I'd like to briefly describe the national pilot-test of this cultural competency assessment, which our Center conducted with 9 peer-run programs in the U.S. Our evaluation goal was to learn whether mental health peer-run programs would find our assessment easy to use and effective in bringing about needed changes. The programs shared that they found the assessment to be user-friendly, encouraging, and practical. Some of their challenges included a lack of resources to fund meaningful diversity activities, reluctance on the part of staff and membership to engage in conversations about the dynamics of difference, and struggles finding cultural leaders who had the time or expertise to contribute. In spite of these difficulties, however, most of the programs felt that the tool helped them to make significant progress, especially through creating a manageable Diversity Action Plan. It is our hope that you also will find our assessment tool useful as you develop plans and goals for diversity inclusion.

Slide 37:

Thank you for time today. If you still have questions after this webinar, you can request free technical assistance from our Center, which we offer on a time-limited basis. Call us at 312.355.1696 or click the "free technical assistance" button on the web page for *The Cultural Competency Guidebook* on our web site.

Slide 38 (announcer):

Thank you for listening. You can obtain additional Solutions Suite recordings, or download a transcript, by visiting the Center's web site.