



# Deep Diversity: Cultural Competence in the Mayor's Office

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The Mayor's Office has tremendous influence on our growing city's social, cultural, economic, and political life. The Mayor's Office sets policy, models tone, and leads by example. Nashville's Mayor selects leaders for Metro's Executive Departments and has discretion to hire in the Mayor's Office. In addition, the Mayor's Office makes appointments to county boards and commissions that set policy, make critical decisions on civic development, and plan for the utilization of financial and physical resources. Furthermore, the next Mayor will make significant decisions regarding constituency services, social equity initiatives, sponsored events, and who will represent the Mayor's Office in those efforts.

This paper is intended to emphasize the importance of *cultural competence* within our city's executive office and recommends that the next Mayor make cultural competence a central value in making hiring, appointment, and policy decisions. The Metro Human Relations Commission looks forward to working with the next Mayor to support and facilitate culturally competent governance throughout the new administration.

## **Nashville's Diverse Population**

Metropolitan Nashville and Davidson County are growing increasingly diverse – racially, culturally, and religiously. Indeed, this trend has been a significant topic of conversation throughout Nashville's recent mayoral race as well as in national press. Often-cited statistics show the impact of our increasing diversity:

- Between 2000 and 2012, immigrants accounted for nearly 60% of Nashville's overall population growth.<sup>i</sup>
- During the 2013/2014 school year, 36% of children entering kindergarten in Metro Nashville Public Schools were African American and 19% were Hispanic/Latino.<sup>ii</sup>
- Students in Metro Nashville Public Schools speak more than 130 languages.<sup>iii</sup>
- By 2035, Nashville will not have a majority race/ethnicity; Whites, African Americans, and Hispanic/Latinos will each make up about 30% of the population with other immigrant groups making up the other 10%.<sup>iv</sup>
- Nashville is home to the largest Kurdish community in the United States.<sup>v</sup>

## Beyond Diversity to “Cultural Competence”

Many social and civic leaders throughout Nashville have recognized the need to ensure that Metro’s workforce reflects the diverse community that it serves. This is no less true for the Mayor’s office. It is undisputed that successful governments are responsive to their constituents. Therefore, cities and counties must make an effort to know their residents and respond to their needs. As communities change, public, private, and nonprofit organizations are stretching to respond to these needs – finding innovative ways to provide services to this increasingly diverse population that are respectful of and attentive to distinct cultural beliefs and traditions.

Increasing and maintaining objectively measurable diversity within local government is a worthy and necessary effort, and Metro must continue its intentional efforts in this regard. However, given the broadening social, cultural, and religious complexities in Nashville’s demographics, we must strive to achieve and exhibit a deeper diversity through *cultural competence*. **Truly effective local governments within multi-cultural communities are culturally competent – exhibiting deep diversity.**

Some think of cultural competency as affirmative action, multiculturalism, diversity training, equal employment opportunity, political correctness, or other similar methods or laws used to increase statistical diversity. While these are facets of cultural competence, it is a much broader concept that begins with the dominant culture becoming self-aware of its own customs and privilege and then being responsive to and understanding of the cultural differences of other people within a system.

Cultural competency can best be understood as “respect for and understanding of diverse ethnic and cultural groups, their histories, traditions, beliefs, and value systems in the provision and delivery of services. In practice, culturally competent public administration emphasizes the capacity of public organizations and their employees to effectively provide services that reflect the different cultural influences of their constituents or clients.”<sup>vi</sup> Cultural competency converts the knowledge gained about groups and individuals into policies and procedures that result in practices that increase the quality of the services to produce better outcomes.

Cultural competence is not intended only to ensure inclusion for “new Americans.” Inequality and oppression persist in our social and cultural institutions because long-festering wounds in race relations have yet to be adequately addressed. An administration that develops and exhibits cultural competence will also recognize the effect these wounds continue to have on African American communities, families, and individuals. Likewise, deep diversity ensures inclusion and social equity for LGBT individuals and other marginalized groups, recognizing the unique struggles they and their families face.

# **Key Components of Cultural Competence**

Cultivating and achieving cultural competence requires a range of awareness, knowledge, and skills. The key components are: 1) Self-awareness; 2) Understanding and valuing others; 3) Knowledge of social inequalities; 4) Skills to interact effectively with diverse communities in different contexts; and 5) Commitment to foster equity and inclusion.

## **Self-awareness**

Self-awareness is the consciousness of our own social identities, cultures, biases, and perspectives. It entails the ability to understand who we are and what we bring to relationships and situations. One of the more challenging tasks in practicing self-awareness is examining our implicit or unconscious biases – recognizing the attitudes or stereotypes that affect our understanding, actions, and decisions about which we are not consciously aware.

## **Understanding and valuing others**

In addition to self-knowledge and awareness, cultural competence requires knowledge and appreciation of the social identities, cultures, and worldviews of other people. Many of these competencies mirror the ones in self-awareness. We must first gain knowledge and awareness of the social identities of other people, their cultural influences, and how they intersect. However, we must go further and gain the ability to value and appreciate ways of being, doing, and thinking other than our own. While it may be uncomfortable, this component also requires that we be able to recognize how other people express internalized superiority and inferiority.

## **Knowledge of societal inequities**

We cannot understand ourselves or other people, or create greater equity, without considering the larger socio-political and historical contexts of which we are a part. We need to understand different forms of privilege and oppression and how they operate on interpersonal, cultural, institutional, and structural levels. We need to further understand how different forms of oppression and privilege affect people's experiences, opportunities, and access to social power. It is also critical to appreciate the interlocking nature of different types of inequality and how they intersect in people's lives. Finally, this component requires that we consider the fact that immigrants and refugees from other cultures will have experienced different forms of oppression and inequality that will shape their world view.

## **Skills to interact effectively with a diversity of people**

In addition to understanding self, others, and society, we need the ability to adapt to and work collaboratively with diverse populations 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 skills inherent to this component of cultural competence include: embracing, integrating, and adapting to different cultural styles; dealing productively with conflict due to cultural differences and the dynamics of inequality; and engaging in dialogue about social identities, diversity, and oppression issues.

## **Commitment to foster equity and inclusion**

Cultural competence 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 that help to ensure diversity, fairness, and proactive involvement. Competencies for creating change are needed at various levels: skills for continual self-development, including for self-education, self-reflection, and personal changes; skills to transform institutions into bodies that create, critically analyze, implement, or advocate for organizational norms, policies, and practices that are equitable and inclusive; and skills for creating societal change by being able to work collaboratively with others to foster equity and inclusion.

## **Recommendation**

The Metro Human Relations Commission recommends that when hiring for positions within the administration, the next Mayor consider the depth of awareness, knowledge, and skills needed to ensure that advisors and leaders within the Mayor's Office can cultivate and achieve cultural competence. That is to say, we recommend that when filling the myriad positions within the administration, the Mayor think about deep diversity – ensuring that those with influence on policymaking and on setting the tone challenge us all to be more culturally competent.

We look forward to working with the next Mayor to support and facilitate culturally competent governance throughout the new administration. We can offer:

- Training to staff, boards, and commissions;
- Examples of best practices in cultural competence; and
- On-going technical support to the Mayor's Office and other Metro entities to assist in making culturally competent decisions and policies.

Resources consulted:

Abraham David Benavides and Julie C. T. Hernández, “Serving Diverse Communities – Cultural Competency,” in *Public Management*, July 2007, p. 14.

Tony Carrizales, “Exploring Cultural Competency Within the Public Affairs Curriculum,” *Journal of Public Affairs Education*, Jan. 2010, p. 593.

Diane J. Goodman, Ed.D., “Cultural Competency for Social Justice,” *Commission for Social Justice Educators Blog*, <https://acpacsje.wordpress.com/2013/02/05/cultural-competency-for-social-justice-by-diane-j-goodman-ed-d/>

Understanding Implicit Bias, <http://kirwaninstitute.osu.edu/research/understanding-implicit-bias/>

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<sup>i</sup> Partnership for a New American Economy analysis of 2008-2012 American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates.

<sup>ii</sup> Data provided by MNPS.

<sup>iii</sup> Data provided by MNPS.

<sup>iv</sup> <http://www.nashvillempo.org/growth/>

<sup>v</sup> Galen Spencer Hull, “Nashville Should Be Known for Welcoming Immigrants,” *The Tennessean*, May 19, 2015. <http://www.tennessean.com/story/opinion/contributors/2015/05/17/nashville-welcoming-immigrants/27479183/>

<sup>vi</sup> Margo L. Bailey, “Cultural Competency and the Practice of Public Administration,” in *Diversity and Public Administration: Theory, Issues, and Perspectives*, ed. Mitchell F. Rice (Armonk, N.Y.: M. E. Sharpe, 2005), p. 177.