

Standards for Cultural Competence in the National Park Service

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Essential Cultural Diversity Competencies for all Employees

Introduction

The National Park Service supports and encourages the development of standards for culturally competence in national parks and connected to the work of the National Park Service.

It is well established that the United States is presently undergoing major demographic change. The 1990 to 2000 population growth was the largest in American history with a dramatic increase in people of color from 20 percent to 25 percent.

These changes alter and increase the diversity of the people who make up the citizens of the United States.

The complexities associated with cultural diversity in the United States affect all aspects of government work requiring government employees to strive to deliver culturally competent services to a potentially ever-increasing range of customers.

CULTURAL DIVERSITY AND CLARITY

While cultural diversity is taking on a broader meaning to include the cultural experiences of people of different genders, social classes, religious and spiritual beliefs, sexual orientations, ages, and physical and mental abilities, the National Park Service is still having a difficult time in diversifying its workforce, as well as its visitor base, and so, these two issues will likely remain paramount.

Standard 1. Ethics, Values, and Assumptions — Employees of the National Park Service function in accordance with the values, ethics, and standards of the Federal Government, the Department of the Interior, and the National Park Service.

Through training and awareness activities, employees will understand that personal and professional values may be different from those of park neighbors, park users, non-users of parks, under-served groups and/or non-traditional groups.

Standard 2. Self-Awareness — Through the use of training and personal awareness activities, employees develop an understanding of their own individual cultural values and belief systems, as well as the values and belief systems of the larger nation. This will include the history of racism and race relations in the stories, good and bad, that reflect the heritage of the United States.

Supervisors receive feedback and monitoring of performance and identify features of their own professional style that might impede or enhance their own practice of cultural competence.

Members of the NPS Training Community evaluate the validity and applicability of new techniques, research, and existing knowledge in terms of Cultural Competence.

Standard 3. Cross-Cultural Knowledge — Employees working for the National Park Service continue to develop specialized knowledge and understanding about the history, traditions, values, family systems, communication styles, and cultural expressions of the client groups they serve, including previously underserved groups.

Standard 4. Cross-Cultural Skills— Employees of the National Park Service understand the impact and application of appropriate approaches, skills, and techniques that may reflect their understanding and the role of culture in sharing parks with all visitors.

Standard 5. Connecting with Communities — Employees of the National Park Service are knowledgeable about and skillful in the use of diverse media services available in the community and broader society that help to communicate the history, mission, and availability of national parks to all Americans and all potential visitors. This is also an opportunity for employees to work collaboratively with groups of people who are affiliated by geographic proximity, special interests, or similar situations with respect to issues affecting their well being.

Standard 6. Workforce Diversity — IMR employees understand and support recruitment, hiring, and retention efforts in national park programs and offices that work to ensure all types of diversity within the Region and the Service.

Standard 7. Interpretation — The Interpreters and Managers of IMR parks adhere closely to the National Park Service Interpretation and Education Renaissance Plan with special emphasis on engaging all people to help them make enduring connections to America's Special Places.

In accordance with the Renaissance Plan, IMR interpreters will be trained in the knowledge, skills, and approaches necessary for civic engagement, especially with previously underrepresented groups and non-traditional park users.

In keeping with this competency, Interpreters are encouraged to:

- **Use new technologies** in ways that allow them to connect with underrepresented groups, schools, educators, and professional and advocacy, as well as organizations with different interests or opinions in order for the national parks to remain relevant in a changing America.
- **Embrace new partners in Interpretation and Education**, at the national and community levels, who serve and have served ethnic minority groups, especially those who use national parks at a rate well below that of white Americans. This will include making committed efforts to diversify our Volunteer base in parks.
- **Create a Culture of Evaluation** that includes information on the use patterns and interests of previously underserved American populations.

NPS interpreters are able to work with a wide range of people who are culturally different or similar to themselves, and establish avenues for inclusion of the learning styles and cultural backgrounds of targeted audiences. Interpreters are also trained to understand nonverbal communication skills as they relate to diverse audiences.

Standard 8. Protection — IMR Protection Rangers will be trained in diversity awareness in areas pertinent to Law Enforcement such as Cultural

Competence, Diversity awareness, personal leadership and responsibility, and their relevance to the work of a peace officer. Training will include issues such as stereotyping, prejudice, privilege, power, and discrimination in the context of historical and contemporary law enforcement.

Standard 9. Maintenance — IMR Facility Managers and supervisors will understand and appreciate the changing uses of various facilities in national parks based on use patterns of new generations of American families. Planning and design of picnic areas, campgrounds, trails, visitor centers, and other facilities will take this training into account.

Standard 10. Training — NPS Education and Training employees create, purchase, and contract for educational and training programs that help advance cultural competence within the National Park Service. NPS training promotes the learning and adoption of skills, practices, and interactions that provide culturally responsive planning, administration, and service delivery.

Standard 11. Language — The National Park Service, where and when appropriate, seeks to provide for the provision of information and services in the language most appropriate to the visitor, which may include use of employees trained to speak languages other than English.

The NPS takes reasonable steps to provide services and information in appropriate languages other than English to ensure that people with limited English proficiency are effectively informed and can effectively participate in and benefit from the programs of the National Park Service. This takes into account the safety implications of language barriers.

Standard 12. Outreach — National Park Service employees are trained to communicate information about the parks and resources of the national parks to diverse and/or non-traditional users with a special focus on previously underrepresented groups. Training allows NPS employees to create an atmosphere within the park where stories that relate directly to various communities are integrated into the culture of the park. Employees are able to shift from an exclusive focus on the interpretive product and give more attention to needs of the audience.

DEFINITIONS (move to end?)

Culture

Culture relates to ways in which tradition is passed on from generation to generation. Culture are those socially transmitted behaviors, customs, arts, beliefs, institutions, and all other products of human work and thought that result in patterns, attitudes, and traits considered as the expression of a particular period, class, community, or population and that characterize the functioning of a group.

Competence

"A competency is a measurable pattern of knowledge, skills, abilities, behaviors, and other characteristics that an individual needs to perform work roles or occupational functions successfully."

Cultural Competence

Cultural competence is the integration and practical use of knowledge about individuals and groups of people into standards, policies, practices, and attitudes used in appropriate settings to work effectively in cross-cultural situations, and make services and experiences relevant to all, thereby producing better outcomes.

Cultural Competence is comprised of four primary components:

- (a) Awareness of one's own cultural worldview;
- (b) Awareness of one's own attitude towards cultural differences;
- (c) Knowledge of different cultural practices and worldviews; and

(d) Cross-cultural skills.

At the organizational level, the National Park Service must make itself into an organization where employees at all levels are trained to:

- (1) Value diversity;
- (2) Have the capacity for cultural self-assessment;
- (3) Be conscious of the dynamics inherent when cultures interact;
- (4) Institutionalize and maintain knowledge about cultures without creating stereotypes; and
- (5) Develop public programs and services that reflect an understanding of diversity between and within cultures.

To ensure the future relevancy of the National Park Service, all five elements must be present in every level of the service.

These elements should be reflected in professional attitudes, training, recognition and awards, management policies, personnel performance appraisals, and public services. The specifics should occur both on the ground and/or on the Internet.

KNOWING THE DIFFERENCE

It is important to note that Cultural Competence is different from Cultural Knowledge, Cultural Awareness or Cultural Sensitivity.

Cultural Competency emphasizes the idea of *effectively* operating in different cultural contexts through the development of specific skills.

Knowledge, awareness, and sensitivity do not include this concept and are different in a variety of ways

Cultural Knowledge is familiarization based on training about or experience with certain cultural characteristics, history, values, belief systems, and behaviors of the members of another ethnic group.

Cultural Awareness has to do with developing sensitivity and understanding of the lives of people from other ethnic groups. It is hoped that training

creates personal changes in terms of attitudes, values, openness and flexibility that learners develop in relation to persons from other backgrounds. This awareness requires some level of cultural knowledge. (See above)

Cultural Sensitivity has to do with developing the knowledge that cultural differences as well as similarities exist, without assigning negative values to those differences.

While all of these approaches are both noteworthy and praiseworthy, they do not, by themselves, produce the knowledge, skills, and abilities reflected by standards, policies, practices, and attitudes used to work effectively in cross-cultural situations.

Generally speaking, training will allow employees to move from Cultural Knowledge, to Cultural Awareness, and then to Cultural Sensitivity before developing Cultural Competence.

There is no reason to think that sophisticated Cultural Competence would come naturally to any NPS employee without substantial training and experience since such competencies require a high level of professionalism and knowledge.

Moreover, we should share the understanding that Cultural Competence is both complex and an ongoing learning process that must become integral and central to the everyday work of the National Park Service.

Essential Cultural Competencies for NPS Employees

(1) NPS employees should understand culture and its functions in human behavior and society, recognizing the strengths, weaknesses and values that exist in all cultures.

(2) NPS employees gain, through training, an understanding of their own personal and cultural values and beliefs as a first step in appreciating the profound impact of culture in the lives of Americans.

Training also provides employees with background on the nature of race and the history of racism, discrimination, and intolerance as it relates to race, ethnicity, national origin, color, sex, sexual orientation, age, marital status, political belief, religion, and mental or physical disability. These factors are explored and taught in training as they are practiced in the U.S.

(3) NPS employees should have a knowledge base of the many cultures that make up the people of the United States of America and be able to demonstrate competence in providing services that are sensitive to those cultures and to differences among people and cultural groups. This knowledge covers, to the extent reasonably possible, the history, traditions, and values of client groups that have previously been underserved.

(4) NPS employees will gain knowledge about U.S. social, cultural, and political systems, including the National Park Service, how they operate, and how they have served or failed to serve specific groups of Americans. This will include knowledge of institutional, class, and language, social, and cultural barriers that prevent diverse groups from using NPS services. This also includes knowledge of personal privilege and how this fits to visitor constraints across cultural groups.

(5) NPS employees have skills in collaboration and a willingness to engage in active, non-judgmental listening.

(6) Employees have the ability to express respect and appreciation for difference across cultural lines.

(7) Employees are open to learning about people and groups whose values and experiences are different, and are willing to challenge their own concepts about what “diversity” is.

Essential Cultural Competencies for Managing a Diverse Workforce

NPS Managers develop their practice of Cultural Competency in a numerous ways including:

1. Recruiting, developing, and retaining a diverse, high quality workforce in an equitable manner;
2. The ability to employ Cultural Competency best practices;
3. Respecting, understanding, and valuing individual differences to help achieve the vision and mission of the organization;
4. Collaboration skills;
5. A willingness to engage in conflict resolution and change management;
6. Sensitivity towards not labeling groups and individuals with regards to diversity;
7. Ability to correctly identify diversity issues and understand related tensions;
8. Ability to express respect and appreciation across cultural lines;
9. Ability to be open to learning about people and groups whose values and experiences are different;
10. Ability to build workforce teams with members from different cultures;
11. Willingness to challenge their own concepts about what diversity is;
12. Ability to educate others about how to develop diverse “people skills”;
13. The willingness to engage in active, non-judgmental listening;
14. Leading and managing an inclusive workplace that maximizes viewpoint and talents of each person to achieve sound business results;
15. Developing and using measures and rewards to hold self and others accountable for achieving results that embody the broad principles of diversity;
16. Tracking park diversity statistics while staying current with emerging demographic trends for the nation, the region, and the park;
17. Assessing the needs for the provision of sign language interpretation and translation services;
18. Creating service programs that are designed to be more appropriate to previously under served populations;

19. Including participation by previously under served groups as stakeholders in the development of park planning documents;
20. Attending to social issues (for example, housing, police, and discrimination in local communities) that may be of concern to park employees from diverse backgrounds;
21. Understanding whether or not there are hate groups located near the park and in the neighboring region, and the impact those groups might have on diversity and park use;
22. Not accepting or glossing over remarks or behavior that insult or demean diverse visitors or staff;
23. Being aware of racism and sexism in parks and in local communities. Engaging in dialogue and training in the attempt to create growth and healing in those places;
24. Developing staffing plans that support the continued relevance of the National Park Service to all visitors and reflect a diversified workforce;
25. Developing and utilizing performance standards that measure culturally competent practice, and actions of all employees;
26. Ensuring that youth programs, like the Junior Ranger and Web Ranger programs, enhance resource stewardship, knowledge, and relevancy among ethnically diverse communities;
27. Collaborate with educational institutions, professional organizations and ethnic communities, tribes and other NPS programs, parks, and visitors to reflect community-driven programs that mirror the diversity of America, and;
28. Ensuring that diverse-serving institutions of higher learning are included in park research projects such as those conducted by Cooperative Ecosystem Study Units and/or other universities as contracted with social science scholars across the country.