

Cultural Humility in Practice

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Content

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It is different from cultural competence. Competence can sound like a destination: learn enough about a culture and you are done. Humility says the learning never ends, because every person is the expert on their own life, and no amount of training makes you the expert on theirs.

What it looks like.

- Ask instead of assume. When culture, language, or values might matter, ask the person rather than guessing.
- Notice your own lens. Everyone has one. Knowing yours is the first step to not imposing it.
- Share power. In a meeting or a plan, make room for the person to lead, especially when they have usually been talked over.
- Stay open to being wrong. A gentle correction is a gift, not a failure.

Why it matters for equity. People who have been underserved have often been on the receiving end of confident assumptions. Humility interrupts that. It is also realistic: we serve people from many cultures, and curiosity will take you further than certainty ever will.

You do not have to know everything about everyone. You have to stay curious, stay humble, and let people be the authority on themselves.

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Choose the relevant guidance, verify fit and currency, and apply it to the work product using Cultural Humility in Practice.

Confirm the current purpose, audience, and decision authority before using Cultural Humility in Practice to choose the relevant guidance, verify fit and currency, and apply it to the work product.

Choose the sections of Cultural Humility in Practice that match the situation; do not apply unrelated guidance as a blanket rule.

Document the action taken from Cultural Humility in Practice, the people affected, unresolved questions, and the responsible follow-up owner.

For community engagement staff, use Cultural Humility in Practice to choose the relevant guidance, verify fit and currency, and apply it to the work product; plan accessible participation, make influence visible, and close the feedback loop with community partners. Start by ask instead of assume. When culture, language, or values might matter, ask the person rather than guessing.

Use cultural and community context to ask better questions, never to predict an individual or treat a group as monolithic.

Do not replace official legal, policy, clinical, supervisory, program, or Tribal authority.

Do not infer an individual's identity, preferences, needs, or experience from group-level information.

State uncertainty, use current authoritative sources, and escalate when the decision exceeds the user's role.

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