



NORTHWESTERN  
COUNSELING  
& SUPPORT SERVICES  
2021 - 2024

# Diversity & Cultural Awareness Plan

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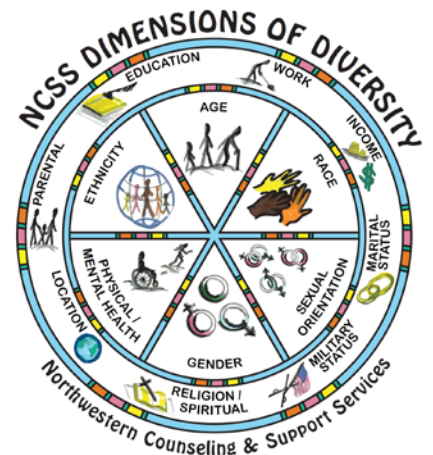
*Increasing Equity and Inclusion*

**Committee Purpose Statement:** To establish a respectful and welcoming environment for all persons served and employed by raising awareness and increasing sensitivity to achieve optimal health. (Est. 2009)

## Our Commitment

NCSS' commitment to increasing awareness for diversity, cultural, equity and inclusion began in 2009 with a comprehensive review of our community and staff. Like most things, time altered our focus, but never our commitment. We are redefining Diversity and Inclusion to capture the qualitative aspects of people's experience, and will continually educate staff to ensure optimal service delivery. The NCSS Diversity Plan is the framework that influences our everyday effort to be a welcoming and accepting organization for all persons and informs the Agency's overall strategic plan.

1. We are committed to **delivering services** that are evidenced based, trauma informed, and peer based.
2. We are committed to **employment practices** that are inclusive and free of discrimination.
3. We are committed to having an **organizational environment** that is safe and active in education of public health threats.
4. We are committed to **public relations** efforts to reduce *STIGMA* surrounding mental health by **Striving To Increase Good Mental Health Awareness**.



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*"We must remember why we are here; to create a stronger community – together. Our community needs us. And that is within our control: stronger than any divide. Despite our differences, through this we can stand strong as a shining example of what makes us truly great – not as NCSS, Vermonters, or even Americans, but as human beings." NCSS Diversity Committee*

## Our Achievements

NCSS' cross-divisional committee worked to provide a welcoming workplace that is inclusive of all who enter. A few of achievements of the previous plan efforts include the following:

- ✓ Public display of Agency's "dimensions of diversity" hung around all facilities to increase awareness (2018)
- ✓ Window display of "WELCOME" in the surrounding areas 14 most prevalent languages (2018)
- ✓ Awarded the Breastfeeding Friendly Award from the Department of Health (2017)
- ✓ Monthly education campaigns bring awareness to a variety of historical events (2016-ongoing)
- ✓ Surveying employees, clients and board to identify strengths, weakness, and opportunities (annually)
- ✓ Partnered with TIC Committee to generate fresh paint, lighting, and art to create an aesthetic environment to promote a sense of safety, calming and actively resist re-traumatization (ongoing)
- ✓ Sponsored training opportunities on topics such as "Considering the Whole Person", "Cultural Linguistics", "Incorporating Gender and Queer Affirming Care", "13<sup>th</sup> Documentary", "Peer to Peer Community Building & Networking for People with Disabilities", "No Two People are the Same" & more (2016-2020)
- ✓ Selected a new unified electronic medical record (EMR) system with fillable and reportable gender identity fields (2020)
- ✓ Updated policies that disproportionately impact applicants of a particular group by eliminating employment application questions about criminal convictions and salary history (2017 - 2018)
- ✓ Added Relias trainings for all staff annually; "Understanding Unconscious Bias" and "Your Role in Workplace Diversity." (2018)



## NCSS Values

1. Safety
2. Compassion
3. Responsiveness
4. Integrity

*"Engagement is not compliance... Getting someone to comply does not mean they are engaged."*  
*Chacku Mathai, MHF Advocacy Day 2021*

## Key Performance Indicators 2021-2024

Service Delivery	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Employee education to build comfort and understanding in cultural discussion – <b>staff treated me with respect</b></li> <li>Language translation and ASL enhances service delivery to local, culturally, diverse communities to ensure services are not unintentionally marginalizing – <b>I received services that were right for me; providers open to perspectives; inclusive needs</b></li> <li>Address disparities in access – <b>video/phone options are as effective as in-person</b></li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ Client satisfaction survey Q3,</li> <li>✓ Client satisfaction survey Q1</li> <li>✓ # ASL trainings</li> <li>✓ Client satisfaction survey Q12, Q13, Q14</li> <li>✓ Access rates</li> </ul>
Employment Practices	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Leadership development to ensure inclusion in leading and hiring.</li> <li>People have opportunities to be their whole self at work – <b>their opinion matters</b></li> <li>Integrate inclusion strategies into performance infrastructures.</li> <li>Ensure equity in pay</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ 3.65 or higher EEE survey #7</li> <li>✓ % of staff with PDP goal includes DEI</li> <li>✓ Review pay and adjust issues of inequity</li> </ul>
Organizational Environment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>People experience safety – <b>encouraged to take action on opportunities or concerns</b></li> <li>Systemic practice and policy change</li> <li>Racial equity habit building</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ 4.00 or higher EEE survey #DA4</li> <li>✓ # of policies reviewed</li> <li>✓ 21 day challenge PDP goal for leaders</li> <li>✓ # of education/training</li> </ul>
Public Relations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Prioritize our target communities by developing education and support initiatives for underserved groups – <b>greatest potential impact to further efforts</b></li> <li>Campaigns and community functions crafted to represent the community</li> <li>Share stories to reduce stigma</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ # of external initiatives</li> <li>✓ Diversity survey 4.15 or higher Q#7</li> <li>✓ Increase Legislative lobbying</li> <li>✓ # of stories published in media modes</li> </ul>

*“When we deny our stories, they define us. When we own our stories, we get to write a brave new ending.” Author Brené Brown*



NCSS, as a Trauma Informed Care organization and the Diversity & Cultural Awareness Committee is committed to agency-wide efforts that meet or exceed the expectations of our clients and staff. Together, we will focus on the four commitment areas using the above performance indicators to truly achieve high quality, inclusive services. So what is diversity and inclusion, and what does it mean at NCSS?

Diversity is a safety issue, and NCSS' number one value is safety. We must ensure our stakeholders are represented and do not experience macroaggressions, unconscious biases, or other stressors that impact their mental health and psychological safety. In an increasingly complex, diverse, and polarized society it is more important than ever to increase people's sensitivity through awareness. Inclusion is an agency-wide effort that ensures all individuals feel a sense of belonging; are respected and valued as individuals and for their contributions to the organization. To truly cultivate an environment conducive to advancing equity and inclusion, every leader needs to see the value in differences, which requires promotion of both intellectual and emotional belonging.

An essential component of the committee's work will be to provide more educational opportunities to improve intercultural competence across the Agency. Deliberate efforts will be pursued to ensure the removal of barriers to employee engagement and reinforce learning. By focusing on systemic issues such as racism, racial injustice, social inequities and health disparities, we will positively impact change; minimizing and eventually abolishing systemic oppression. To learn more, there are resources available on the NCSS Intranet under Wellness & Safety click on the Diversity tab.

To achieve these lofty goals, organizational assessments and surveys will be administered to address gaps and strengthen the foundation of this plan. To this point and as an example, NCSS will partner with the local Abenaki community to identify barriers that might keep Abenaki community members from accessing mental health services. The aim is to create infrastructure and programming focused on culturally sensitive care for Abenaki populations that includes awareness of trauma inflicted on the Abenaki historically.

To be an organization that advances diversity, equity, and inclusion, is a responsibility of each of us. Collectively we become stronger when we listen and learn about how cultural differences enhance the services that we provide to the community. Diversity is like a bread recipe – when you mix all the different ingredients together your bread will rise; exclude an important ingredient and your bread will fall flat!

*"And every known nook of our nation and every corner called our country, our people diverse and beautiful, will emerge battered and beautiful." Author Amanda Gorman, 2021*

All are welcome at NCSS. We have an inclusive culture that understands the value of diversity.

Having an engaged workforce with diverse perspectives helps us to be creative, which ultimately leads to better outcomes.

Todd Bauman,  
CEO

