Equity Framework - 2023

Minnesota Elder Justice Center
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I. FRAMEWORK

Mission

Minnesota Elder Justice Center's mission is to alleviate and prevent the abuse, neglect, and financial exploitation of older or vulnerable adults.

Vision

Minnesota Elder Justice Center is a trusted resource that improves lives, communities, and systems with and on behalf of elders and vulnerable adults.

Values

Diversity, Equity and & Inclusion (DEI)

We model the fair treatment and full participation of all people, especially persons who have historically been underrepresented or subject to discrimination on the basis of identity or ability.

Excellence

We are committed, knowledgeable, curious, and creative in all our work.

Innovation

We are a learning organization that is willing to question the status quo, create novel solutions and strategies, and take risks to achieve our mission.

Integrity

We practice intellectual rigor and ethical behavior, transparency, and accountability to our many diverse stakeholders while staying true to our mission and equity framework.

Justice

We seek justice with and for older adults and vulnerable adults who have experienced abuse, neglect, and financial exploitation.

Openhearted Collaboration

We are committed to being inclusive in creating and participating in partnerships that improve the lives of Minnesota's older and vulnerable adults.

Responsive Service

We minimize barriers to service and focus on the well-being of older and vulnerable adults. We are respectful, relevant, and responsive.

Guiding Principles

1. Older adults and vulnerable adults provide a rich history of life experiences that should be honored and respected.
2. Freedom from abuse, neglect and financial exploitation are fundamental rights.
3. Older adults, vulnerable adults and their families deserve information about their rights and choices.
4. Abuse, neglect and exploitation of older and vulnerable adults are private tragedies with public consequences.
5. Collaboration and partnerships with key stakeholders are essential to preventing and alleviating abuse, neglect and financial exploitation of older and vulnerable adults.
6. Collaboration between victim services and social services is necessary to reduce abuse, neglect and financial exploitation.
7. Supportive communities and families improve the quality of life for older and vulnerable adults.
8. We acknowledge and must work with the tension that exists between protection and autonomy.
9. The causes and solutions of abuse, neglect and exploitation are complex in scope and origin, because they are individual and systemic. Therefore, multidisciplinary, holistic solutions are needed.
10. Our work is data driven and research based.

Equity Statement

Adopted Fall 2022

It is important for the Minnesota Elder Justice Center (MEJC) to take action in response to what members of Black, Indigenous, and people of color (BIPOC) communities have been experiencing and expressing for years – that their lived experiences and outcomes differ because of systemic racism.

As an organization focused on preventing and alleviating the abuse, neglect, and financial exploitation of older and vulnerable adults, it is critically important to work for a more just, equitable, and inclusive future for BIPOC communities across the state of Minnesota. This work must be done in partnership with others. Elder justice is directly tied to and intertwined with the inequities that disproportionately affect BIPOC communities. These inequities are built into our systems of health care, criminal justice, education, housing and urban planning, and economic support.

Our organization is also committed to deconstructing the systemic racism within our own conversations and practices at the MEJC, engaging in collective reflection and discussion to deepen our understanding of how our actions may not have aligned with our vision of becoming a trusted resource for all Minnesotans. This vision directs the ways in which we build partnerships and relationships, develop policies and systemic responses, and provide services and support to individuals in every community across the state.

Background

Starting in 2019, board members and staff of the Minnesota Elder Justice Center have been working to identify and highlight inequities within our conversations and practices at MEJC, engaging in collective reflection and discussion to deepen our understanding of how our actions may be impeding MEJC from achieving the organization's vision of becoming a trusted resource for all persons needing its services in Minnesota. MEJC created a Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Committee in February 2020 and began deepening our discussions and actions in May 2020. MEJC hired Aurora Consulting to facilitate a 16-month process of completing the Intercultural Development Inventory (IDI) and understanding individual and group profiles, identifying the broad components of work the MEJC team would take on in the next few years, and engaging in education

and learning sessions as well as completing focused projects to make equity and inclusion more concrete in our work.

MEJC team members completed the IDI and participated in group and individual profile discussions in January and February 2021. These conversations set the stage for group discussions to identify the work team members felt important to prioritize and committed to that work. Through full group and DEI Committee discussions between March and May 2021, MEJC board members and staff developed an overarching DEI plan to frame and focus our efforts to achieve more equitable outcomes and develop more inclusive practices.

In Fall 2021 and into early 2022, MEJC created a DEI Action Plan. Highlighted in this plan, the organization committed to ongoing training and education work, as well as creating an updated Strategic Plan.

MEJC currently has a 16-member board, with six of those board members beginning their service in April 2022 to replace the six seats that will be vacated in March 2023 when six long-term board members end their terms. We began an intentional board recruitment and selection process that began in November 2021 and ended with our six new members joining the board nine months ago. We had over 20 applicants and took what we learned from our DEI/equity work to guide our process.

Our Commitments

MEJC fully commits to the long-term work of becoming culturally humble, competent, welcoming, and inclusive of all people both within and outside our organization, as well as in the range of issues and challenges we engage in. This includes (but is not limited to):

- Supporting, engaging, and including people with different racial, cultural, economic, age, and religious backgrounds, varying physical and cognitive abilities, gender identities, sexual orientations, kinship systems, and housing circumstances, helping those we serve obtain access and justice.

- Elevating racial intersectionality.

- Reaching beyond our traditional allies and constituencies and supporting those who may not have as much power or voice as we do.

- Entering intercultural relationships with humility, prepared to listen, learn, follow their lead, and adapt our methods and practices to achieve mutual benefit.

- Recruiting, hiring, retaining, and developing culturally competent staff whose demographics more closely mirror those of our Minnesota communities.

- Recruiting, retaining, and developing culturally competent board members and other volunteers whose demographics more closely mirror those of our Minnesota communities.

Definitions

Definitions change, and as such, we will review and revise these annually.

Access

Access to resources and services is a core component of social justice. Individuals may have different levels of ease, permission, or ability obtaining service or achieving justice based on the number and types of barriers the individual might experience. Access means eliminating socio-economic, cognitive and physical ability, language, education, mobility, and other barriers so all individuals can obtain the service they seek.

Bias

A tendency or preference that inhibits impartial judgment, such as a prejudice in favor of or against a person, group, or action. Bias occurs unconsciously ("implicit bias") and consciously ("explicit bias").

BIPOC

BIPOC is the acronym for Black, Indigenous, and People of Color. It is used to undo Native invisibility and anti-Blackness with the intention of dismantling white supremacy and advancing racial justice.

Pronounced "bye-pock," this is a term specific to the United States, intended to center the experiences of Black and Indigenous groups and demonstrate solidarity between communities of color."[1]

The term may be used by MEJC as shorthand to describe people who identify as a member of at least one of the following racial and ethnic census categories: Black or African American, Asian, American Indian and Alaska Native, Native Hawaiian, and Other Pacific Islander, Some Other Race,[2] and Hispanic or Latino.[3] **We recognize the problems inherent in using such a broad term. However, we use it to increase document readability**. Terms like BIPOC can be useful for broad inclusivity when referring to social groups. It is important to keep in mind, however, that these groups are not homogeneous. The BIPOC acronym appreciates the shared experiences and collective power of communities of color. Still, it recognizes that these experiences are not always the same and that these communities have unique histories and cultures.[4]

MEJC may interchange BIPOC and the phrase "Indigenous People and/or People of Color."

Regarding word choice, we will be as specific as possible. If we are referring to an individual and we know that person's specific race, ethnicity, and/or cultural group we will refer to them by

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[1] https://www.ywcaworks.org/blogs/ywca/fri-01152021-1332/why-we-use-bipoc

[2] U.S. Census. https://bit.ly/3D2GOIX

[3] https://www.census.gov/topics/population/hispanic-origin/about.html

[4] https://www.google.com/url?q=https://www.verywellmind.com/what-is-bipoc-5025158&sa=D&source=docs&ust=1676058588569331&usg=AOvVaw3appKB1Vn2yMVtEzX1vs6r

it. If we are talking about an issue that affects a specific group, we will refer to that group specifically rather than use an umbrella term such as BIPOC or POC.[5]

We will follow a person's preference for describing their race or ethnicity.

Many resources are available on the internet for additional insights, including The BIPOC Project[6] and the YWCA.[7]

Culture

Culture is a social system. It includes shared language, customs, beliefs, values, institutions, and systems. It is passed down from generation to generation.

Culture affects our individual, group, and organizational thoughts and actions, often without us even being aware.

Cultural Competence

Cultural competence is the ability to work respectfully with people from diverse cultures while recognizing one's own cultural biases. It requires a mindset (including cultural humility), a knowledge base, a skillset, a toolset, and experience.

Cultural Humility

Cultural humility is a way of thinking and/or behaving that arises from a practice of self-reflection on how one's own background and the background of others impact teaching, learning, research, creative activity, engagement, and leadership. It is the ability to recognize one's own limitations to avoid making assumptions about other cultures.[8]

It includes the recognition of power dynamics and imbalances, a desire to fix those power imbalances, and to develop partnerships with people and groups who advocate for others.[9]

Cultural Safety

Cultural safety requires the ability to examine privilege while considering multiple contexts of racism, discrimination and prejudice. It provides an environment based on respectful engagement that recognizes and strives to address power imbalances with an aim to create an environment free of racism and discrimination, where people feel safe[10].

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[5] https://www.google.com/url?q=https://www.verywellmind.com/what-is-bipoc-5025158&sa=D&source=docs&ust=1676058588568988&usg=AOvVaw1ALJnWAwbxxlz1Z1uJbCVM

[6] https://www.thebipocproject.org/

[7] https://www.ywcaworks.org/blogs/ywca/fri-01152021-1332/why-we-use-bipoc

[8] Adapted from definitions at https://inclusion.uoregon.edu/what-cultural-humility-basics

[9] https://inclusion.uoregon.edu/what-cultural-humility-basics

[10] https://www.fnha.ca/wellness/wellness-and-the-first-nations-health-authority/cultural-safety-and-humility#:~:text=Cultural%20safety%20is%20an%20outcome,safe%20when%20receiving%20health%20care.

Disparity

A condition of inequality of one community segment vs. another.

The effect is that differences may appear unnecessary, avoidable, unfair, or unjust.

Disparities warrant further investigation because they are social, political, economic, and attitudinal in nature and are often caused by bias. Disparities are interconnected in a way that produces a ripple effect and may cause individuals and groups to experience disparate treatment at multiple points throughout their relationships with the broader society.

Disparities in society are of great concern to MEJC because individuals, their families and their institutions that do not get the help they need are at increased risk of experiencing negative children, youth, family, and aging community outcomes which ripple through the rest of society in the form of increased social and economic costs.

Diversity

The presence of variety in one place. For humans, variety is often measured quantitatively as differences in age, communication style, class, culture, disability, education, ethnicity, familial status, gender, intelligence, language, learning style, marital status, national origin, occupation, physical appearance, physical & mental health, politics, race, regional origin, religion, sexual orientation, socio-economic status, thinking style, viewpoints, etc. The benefit of diversity is in providing the components for adapting or constructing novel combinations; the value of diversity is that major innovations might be generated.

It is common to find people also using the word "diversity" to describe a set of actions geared to accommodating variety (i.e., acknowledging, understanding, accepting, valuing, and celebrating differences). As the pool of knowledge and experience of diversity work continues to evolve, professionals increasingly differentiate between activities that increase variety (diversity) and behaviors that leverage variety to create belonging (inclusion).

Effective

How well a process or a measure addresses its intended purpose. Determining effectiveness requires (1) evaluating how well the process is aligned with the organization's needs and how well it is deployed or (2) evaluating the outcome of the measure as an indicator of mission advancement.

Equity

Outcomes that do not vary across cultural groups (see definition above) and are free from systemic bias or favoritism.

Results are described by data around: Opportunity, Accessibility, Quality, Fairness, Outcomes, Impact, Repair, and Restoration.

Actions toward equity might require different approaches specific to the needs and characteristics of each group.

Ethnicity

Describes a group of people who share a distinct culture, religion, language, and/or place of origin. It is a category independent of Race. Therefore, in the U.S., people of the same *ethnicity* may be members of different *races*, such as Black Hispanics (such as people from Cuba, Brazil, or the Dominican Republic).

Inclusion

The policy and practice of creating opportunities for diversity, mutual learning, benefit, and growth among diverse people. An inclusive environment is free from bias and marginalization. It is welcoming and invites participation.

(oxford) the practice or policy of providing equal access to opportunities and resources for people who might otherwise be excluded or marginalized, such as those with physical or intellectual disabilities and members of other minority groups.

The benefit of inclusion is reciprocity; the value of inclusion is increased trust, cooperation, and effectiveness. Inclusion has generally been measured through surveys asking subjective questions about an individual's feelings of belonging, respect, support, and engagement.

Intersectionality

The interconnected nature of social categorizations such as race, class, and gender as they apply to a given individual or group.[11] In the fields of equity and justice, it is a framework for understanding oppression that highlights how discrimination and exclusion are not simple and can't be solved by focusing on a single issue.[12]

Justice

Justice is defined by cultural and individual concepts of fairness. At the Minnesota Elder Justice Center, justice is survivor-centered. We seek justice with and for individuals who have experienced abuse, neglect and financial exploitation. This includes equitable access to safety and self-determination.

Network

A group of people or organizations who exchange information, contacts, and experience for professional or social purposes; A network may be either informal or formal. The latter establishes processes for engagement.

MEJC's network comprises formal and informal coalitions, partner organizations, and people who utilize our services.

Formal Network: Interconnected relationships among people and/or organizations that are centralized, managed, and involve a process for engagement.

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[11] https://www.nccj.org/intersectionality
[12] https://www.globalcitizen.org/en/content/what-is-intersectionality-explained/

Participant

An actual or potential user of our products, programs, services, or efforts. The reason why we exist. They are who must be satisfied by the organization; they are the ultimate judges of our performance.

People of Color

As used in this plan, this term is intended as shorthand to describe a person or people who identify as a member of a non-white or Indigenous group, inclusive of multiple identities and ethnicities. **We recognize the problems inherent in using such a broad term.** However, we use it only to increase plan readability.

Race

In the U.S., race is a construct that accords people a hierarchy of their value to our society based on appearance and is created as a means of control. In that worldview, people have, according to their physical characteristics, innate qualities that define them as different. Race has the express purpose of establishing and perpetuating caste (superiority and dominance for the group at the top of the hierarchy. In the U.S. that group is composed of those determined to be White).

Races are powerful social categories created historically through oppression, slavery, and conquest. While these categories are formally defined by the US Office of Management and Budget (below), race is a social construct that is constantly changing and evolving.

The OMB main race categories:

White – A person having origins in any of the original peoples of Europe, the Middle East, or North Africa. It includes people who report race entries such as Irish, German, Italian, Lebanese, Arab, Moroccan, or Caucasian.

Black or African American – A person having origins in any of the Black racial groups of Africa. It includes people who report entries such as Negro, African American, Kenyan, Nigerian, or Haitian.

American Indian or Alaska Native – A person having origins in any of the original peoples of North and South America (including Central America) and who maintains tribal affiliation or community attachment. This category includes people who report entries such as Navajo, Blackfeet, Inupiat, Yup'ik, Central American Indian groups, or South American Indian groups.

Asian – A person having origins in any of the original peoples of the Far East, Southeast Asia, or the Indian subcontinent. It includes people who report other detailed Asian responses.

Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander – A person having origins in any of the original peoples of Hawaii, Guam, Samoa, or other Pacific Islands. It includes people who report entries such as Chamorro and other detailed responses.

Some Other Race - Includes all other responses not covered above.

Racism is the belief that humans are divided into separate and exclusive biological entities called "races"; that there is a causal link between inherited physical traits and traits of personality, intellect, morality, and other cultural and behavioral features, and that some races are innately superior to others.[13] The term is also applied to institutions and systems.

Results

Outputs and outcomes achieved. Results should be evaluated based on current performance; performance relative to appropriate comparisons; the rate, breadth, and importance of performance improvements; and the relationship of results measures to key organizational performance requirements.

Stakeholder (Collaborator/Partner)

A person or group who is (or could be) affected by the organization's actions, goals, and policies; or a person or group who works with MEJC to drive mutual goals or desired actions.

Team

All people actively supervised by our organization and involved in accomplishing our work, including paid employees, volunteers, contractors, and interns (paid or unpaid).

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[13] https://www.britannica.com/topic/racism, sourced 3/15/2022

Principles

The following principles must be front and center when executing this Equity Plan.

Seek & Use Disaggregated Data and Information

One of the drivers of disparity is the inability or unwillingness to examine the results of policies and activities for segmented racial, ethnic, or cultural groups. To achieve equity, therefore, we must collect and analyze quantitative and qualitative information in this way. Collect data segmented (at minimum) by census-based racial and ethnic categories and use that data to create options and make decisions.

Make Data-Driven Decisions

Another driver of disparity is the unwillingness to use segmented data to make decisions that ensure parity. Consider racial and ethnic information as we work. Compare results for each group against their presence in our service areas and against the results of the other groups. Provide these analyses when making recommendations.

Leverage Existing Assets

We have valuable assets at our fingertips: knowledgeable staff, board members, partners, community members, technical experts, professional services, state agencies, and more. Tap into these institutional resources at all phases of our work.

Use Existing Authority

Staff and the Board of Directors have individual powers within their jobs and roles. Explore and utilize these authorities as necessary to deliver on this Equity Plan.

Make Policy Changes

We have dozens of policies – those with an external focus and those with an internal focus. While delivering on this Equity Plan, uphold or strengthen policies that will deliver strong equity results. Be ready to change policies that create barriers.

Use Equity to Balance Decisions

When making decisions, give equity sufficient weight. Use segmented data, historical information, and quality comparisons. Develop a method for considering equity results balanced against financial and other business results, such as a decision matrix[14] or balanced scorecard.[15] This will ensure People of Color get due consideration and that their interests are respected.

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[14] http://asq.org/learn-about-quality/decision-making-tools/overview/decision-matrix.html

[15] http://asq.org/learn-about-quality/balanced-scorecard/overview/overview.html