


THE UNIVERSITY of TENNESSEE 
INSTITUTE for PUBLIC SERVICE
MUNICIPAL TECHNICAL ADVISORY SERVICE

PREPARING TENNESSEE CITIES TO SERVE
CHANGING COMMUNITIES
RECOMMENDATIONS FOR MTAS & TENNESSEE MUNICIPALITIES

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DECEMBER 2015

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RECOMMENDATIONS FOR MTAS

FOCUS GROUP RESEARCH

- Coordinate focus groups of small, medium, and large municipality representatives to continue this research and inform additional recommendations for assisting municipalities in diversity initiatives. Gaining additional feedback from cities will also encourage buy-in for future diversity initiatives.

ORGANIZE TASK FORCE GROUPS

- Spearhead the organization of small, medium, and large municipality task force groups charged with coordinating and supporting efforts to expand diversity initiatives and cultural competency efforts among Tennessee cities.

TRAINING INITIATIVES

- Sponsor training initiatives where city leaders and staff may attend half day or all-day diversity or cultural competency training. Training sessions may be coordinated in geographically central municipalities throughout the West, Middle, and East Tennessee grand regions.

ONLINE RESOURCE DASHBOARD

- Although municipalities indicated a preference for the development of a handbook of diversity-related practices that can be utilized by small, medium, and large municipalities, the researcher has concerns that this would not be the most effective tool to foster diversity and inclusion initiatives. A resource 'dashboard' on the MTAS website that includes the following may be more useful and serve as a dynamic and continuous resource for municipalities:
 - 1) municipal demographic information and data links
 - 2) recommendations for municipalities in the implementation of diversity-related initiatives
 - 3) upcoming diversity-related training dates and opportunities
 - 4) other links and resources for diversity and inclusion best practices

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR TENNESSEE MUNICIPALITIES

COMMUNITY CENTERED RESEARCH AND ENGAGEMENT

EXPAND RESEARCH EFFORTS TO BETTER UNDERSTAND COMMUNITY NEEDS

- Identify community demographics and ensure all staff is aware of the municipality's 'demographic snapshot.'
- Organize constituent focus groups (in geographically accessible areas) to further assess community needs.

CONSTITUENT ENGAGEMENT

- Locate community leaders who can communicate and provide consultation on diverse constituent needs (i.e. cultural informant).
- Identify local 'cultural experts' who may assist with culturally relevant programming and other initiatives.
- Recruit community members through various neighborhood associations or groups representing various disadvantaged population segments to serve on a community advisory council or task force to advise on service delivery efforts within the municipality.

TRAINING

MUNICIPAL EMPLOYEE TRAINING

- Ensure training is provided to non-managerial front-line service delivery staff at least once a year, particularly in the areas of cultural competency in working with diverse and disadvantaged groups.
- Provide more expansive and frequent training for managers and city leaders that may span multiple sessions and through various training formats.
- Expand any current and future diversity and cultural competency training to reflect municipal specific demographics.
- Encourage partnerships among smaller municipalities to sponsor and coordinate in-person group training efforts.
- Ensure cultural competency training among municipal first responders—police, fire, emergency, public works personnel—that is occupationally relevant.

TRAINING CONTENT

- Expand diversity and cultural competency training categories related to sexual orientation, gender identity, national origin, and language. Even though cities did not necessarily indicate these categories as future training preferences, the demographic projections indicate that public administrators will need to expand their knowledge of these groups.
- Expand training on working with the elderly and disabled population.

ORGANIZATIONAL CHANGE

INTER-ORGANIZATIONAL POLICIES

- Solicit input from community members, non-managerial staff, volunteers and interns in developing diversity-related programming.
- If the municipality has the resources, designate a department or credible staff member to work with city leadership in coordinating diversity-related efforts within the municipality.

STRATEGIC PLANNING

- Strategic planning efforts may already be incorporated for medium and large municipalities. If not, incorporating diversity initiatives (such as programming, hiring, or training) through the municipality's strategic plan is considered a major first step in organizational change.
- Ensure that any strategic planning diversity-related goals have clear and consistent guidelines for implementation and accountability.

LEADERSHIP

- City leadership actively promotes diversity and inclusion within the municipality, not only through internal municipal government hiring and inclusion efforts, but within the community as well. The leadership also presents a clear sense of diversity-related goals connecting effective service delivery, public service equity, and enhancing community trust vs. ensuring legal protections.
- Appoint an internal staff member (if not already designated) or credible and knowledgeable community volunteer to help increase cultural competency awareness within municipal government and work with municipal leadership in coordinating efforts.

SERVICE DELIVERY

SERVICE DELIVERY ENHANCEMENT

- Review current service delivery and evaluate whether programming or initiative is relevant to all groups or can be adapted in key ways to reflect cultural or economic differences, or simply differences in experiences.
- Utilize the cultural competence expertise of health care and education consultants in developing and informing service delivery or other programming for the public agency.
- Coordinate outreach and marketing to diverse groups to ensure participation in programming and services.
- Explore options for translation and ESL services for service delivery and/or materials.
- Utilize technology and social media to foster communication on existing service delivery and programming to diverse constituency groups.