USDA CIVIL RIGHTS AND CULTURAL SENSITIVITY TRAINING
GOALS

• Provide you with a context to have greater awareness and sensitivity to people from other cultures.
• Help you incorporate the concepts you learn as it affects customer service.
• Familiarize you with the rules regarding Civil Rights Compliance.
The value of “Dignity and Respect for All” will help us to embrace “Cultural Sensitivity” which leads us to respect all peoples’ “Civil Rights”.
First, we’ll talk more about Cultural Sensitivity.

What does culture mean to you?
Culture can be based on things that you can see (such as race, gender, and age), but can also be based on things that you can’t see (such as sexual orientation, lack of education, or poverty).

Someone’s culture can be influenced by shared experiences that have developed over time in relation to social and political contexts, such as a sense of oppression or even coming from a certain stigmatized geographic location, such as areas identified as “slums” or “skid row”.

People define themselves by their experiences and their identity might even contain contradictory elements.
cultural sensitivity
\'kəlch-rəl ,sen(t)-sə-ˈti-və-tē\ noun
1. a set of skills that enables you to learn about and get to know people who are different from you, thereby coming to understand how to serve them better.
Given that you all work or volunteer in the world of providing food assistance, you already have experience and sensitivity to the suffering of others. Cultural sensitivity takes it one step further to understand that reactions to a person’s culture can complicate or increase that person’s suffering, especially if that person is from a culture that is routinely discriminated against, such as the elderly, impoverished, undocumented or gay communities.
Here are a few factors that color the way that we understand and interact with the world. What are other factors that affect the way that you understand the world?

(See below for ideas for prompts)

- Gender
- Age
- Level of education
- Ability/disability
- Education level
- Rural/urban
- Immigrant
- Size of family
Latino Culture:
• Nodding does not mean understanding or agreement, it may mean that they are listening.
• Eye contact can be misread. Out of respect, Latinos may avoid eye contact to people in authority.
• In American culture, arm’s length is polite. In many other cultures around the world, closer than arm’s length is normal. Latinos tend to stand close during gatherings, conversations and in lines and are much more comfortable with physical contact.

Poverty Culture:
• Poverty is NOT a result of laziness – many low-income people work very hard, some at multiple jobs.
• Education and upbringing afford people different opportunities for advancement.
• It’s hard to budget when living in such scarcity.
• Many people in poverty depend much more heavily on oral communication, so having to navigate an environment filled with forms and posters can be difficult. Also, they may not have the funds to afford computers, internet, and smart phones which may mean that they don’t have the same access to information and other resources.

Asian Culture:
• Asian and Asian American parents often make great sacrifices to give their kids optimal home environments and the best possible educational and social opportunities. The remarkable success of young Asian Americans in elite colleges is compelling evidence of the value Asians place on their offspring.
• Asian cultures generally hold elders and ancestors in high esteem.
• Children learn early in life that the family is central and the behavior of individual members reflect on the family.

Alterability Culture:
• Many people with disabilities would like people to see them for the people they are, not define them by what makes them different.
• Many people with disabilities find remarkable ways to adapt to the world despite their limitations.
• People with disabilities reflect the same diversity that exists in the rest of society, including varying social, economic, cultural, family and educational characteristics.
• Just because you observe a disability doesn’t mean that you understand the full picture. For example, deaf does not mean dumb.
As we saw in the previous slide, just because you understand the world a certain way, doesn’t mean that that is the right or only way to understand the world. The goal is sensitivity, not competence. You don’t have to know everything about a client’s culture to be sensitive to them. Try to approach an interaction from a place of curiosity rather than judgment.
Now let’s move on to Civil Rights
The laws associated with Civil Rights aim to provide equal treatment to all, explain all parties’ rights and responsibilities, ensure that there are no illegal barriers to food assistance, and provide excellent customer service.
The USDA recently changed their terminology from protected classes to protected bases. (i.e. you cannot discriminate against someone on the basis of their gender...) The items listed in the first two columns are legally protected bases. It is against the law to discriminate against someone based on one of these protected classes and put barriers in place of getting food assistance. Reprisal is not a protected class but cannot be used as a basis for discrimination.

The third column describes other factors that are often used as a basis for discrimination. In an effort to provide excellent customer service and a climate of dignity and respect for all, it is important to make sure that these things are not used against any client.

One important note is that all TEFAP programs are open to all individuals regardless of their citizenship status. TEFAP, or The Emergency Food Assistance Program, provides much of the food that we distribute. SNAP, or Food Stamps, is the only USDA program that requires documentation.
We quickly want to talk about disabilities because there are many disabilities that are easy to identify, such as a person using a white-tipped cane, or walking with a walker. It’s also important to remember that there are disabilities that are not as easy to identify, such as mental illness or the ability to care for oneself.

(The celebrity’s picture representing thinking/cognitive disabilities is Stephen Fry – he is an actor that has been in the Hobbit, V for Vendetta, and others. He’s outspoken about his battles with mental illness and the picture is notable because he looks like he could be any man you come across in your daily life.)
In general, your goal should be to provide the *same experience* to all of your clients, however you are allowed and encouraged to make reasonable accommodations for people with special needs. This means that if someone has a food allergy, dietary need, or religious food requirement, you can and should do your best to meet their needs.

Be aware that there should be structure to the way that you break your regular distribution mold to meet people’s special needs. You can’t just pick and choose who you want to make reasonable accommodations for, if you provide a reasonable accommodation for one individual with a particular need, you’ll need to do so for others that express that same need.

Reasonable accommodation also refers to helping clients with disabilities – ensuring that they can access your services or making a special effort to meet their needs if your space cannot accommodate their needs (such as helping someone with paperwork or shopping for food).
We’ll explore all three of these types.
Examples include:

- Most clearly: racial segregation in our own recent past
- Could look like:
  - Refusing service or making access difficult based on someone’s:
    - Politics
    - Religion
    - Gender
    - Etc.
Examples include:

- Requiring photo ID for food assistance. This would disproportionately affect undocumented individuals and the poor and elderly, all of whom would be eligible to receive food.
- The way that you set up your program can affect people differently. One pantry used a hallway for their distribution but it didn’t allow enough space for wheelchairs and walkers. They reorganized to accommodate these clients.
Examples include:
- Creating a hostile environment when the client returns for service after filing a complaint.
- Spreading rumors about the client after they have complained.
- Making it difficult for them to get food because you’re unhappy that they complained.
These are four main requirements for being in compliance with USDA Civil Rights.

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Every year, ALL staff and volunteers that have access to clients and food distribution must be trained on Civil Rights compliance!

This is very cool! Our government is so set on ensuring that we don’t put any barriers in place for people, that they require that all staff and volunteers *really* know this information!

Agencies can do their own trainings to staff and volunteers as well.
Requirements

- Annual Training
- Public Notification
- Limited English Proficiency Plan
- Filing Complaints
In order to be in compliance with the Public Notification rules, your agency needs to:

- Consult FOOD for Lane County prior to making any changes the structure of your program, or any changes to the day and times that your program offers food.
- Provide alternative formats for persons with disabilities or with Limited English Proficiency.
- Post the Justice for All poster and tear off sheets where clients can see it whenever food is being distributed.
- Include the non-discrimination statement on any publications or websites that advertise your food program.
Non-Discrimination Statement

In accordance with Federal civil rights law and U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) civil rights regulations and policies, the USDA, its Agencies, offices, and employees, and institutions participating in or administering USDA programs are prohibited from discriminating based on race, color, national origin, sex, disability, age, or reprisal or retaliation for prior civil rights activity in any program or activity conducted or funded by USDA.

Persons with disabilities who require alternative means of communication for program information (e.g. Braille, large print, audiotape, American Sign Language, etc.), should contact the Agency (State or local) where they applied for benefits. Individuals who are deaf, hard of hearing or have speech disabilities may contact USDA through the Federal Relay Service at (800) 877-8339. Additionally, program information may be made available in languages other than English.

To file a program complaint of discrimination, complete the USDA Program Discrimination Complaint Form, (AD-3027) found online at: http://www.ascr.usda.gov/complaint_filing_cust.html, and at any USDA office, or write a letter addressed to USDA and provide in the letter all of the information requested in the form. To request a copy of the complaint form, call (866) 632-9992. Submit your completed form or letter to USDA by:

(1) mail: U.S. Department of Agriculture
Office of the Assistant Secretary for Civil Rights
1400 Independence Avenue, SW
Washington, D.C. 20250-9410;
(2) fax: (202) 690-7442; or
(3) email: program.intake@usda.gov.

This institution is an equal opportunity provider.

This is the full Non-Discrimination Statement which we’re required to put on all postings regarding our food distribution. It’s pretty long...
Fortunately, they gave us a shorter version that we can use.

This Non-Discrimination Statement should appear on ALL materials publicizing your food program to eligible clients (ie. menus, door flyers, websites, calendars, brochures, newsletters...)

It must be in the same size as the other print on the page. We don’t want to hide the fact that we’re equal opportunity providers.

It is an expectation that you will use the full non-discrimination statement anywhere that it fits.
Requirements

Annual Training  Public Notification  Limited English Proficiency Plan  Filing Complaints
In the spirit of dignity and respect for all, and to remove barriers to service, it is important to be able to provide for people that cannot communicate in English.

An LEP Plan is a worksheet that challenges you to think about how you can best serve limited English populations. The final document needs to be kept on file.
There are two different kinds of complaints: Customer Service or Commodity Complains and Civil Rights. While both are taken very seriously, we do have a more rigorous process for following up with the Civil Rights complaints.

**Customer Service complaints** refer to complaints where a client feels that they have been mistreated, or had a negative experience, but it is **not** based on one of the protected classes. Clients may also complain about the food that they received from your agency.

**Civil Rights complaints** are complaints where the reason for the complaint is because the client feels they have been discriminated against based on one or more of the protected classes.
Address the complaint:
• Often it’s hard to keep your cool when you’re receiving a complaint, but getting impatient or defensive only makes it worse.
• Often complaints are about perception. If you can clearly and kindly explain program rules, some complaints get resolved on their own.

Assist with the complaint form:
• Always ask the client to identify persons involved by name and position and clearly explain who did what, when the action occurred, and why they believe the action occurred.
• There does need to be a written record. If the client refuses to fill out the complaint form, you must do it for them.

Assist in resolution:
• For all Civil Rights complaints, Oregon Housing and Community Services must receive a copy of the complaints and the documentation of the follow up.
• Investigate both sides of the complaint and assist in resolution.
• Identify ways to prevent a similar occurrence in the future. This can be as simple as putting up signage, or reeducating volunteers.
To reduce the risk of a Civil Rights Complaint, ask yourself the following questions each time a client comes into your program.

| Am I treating this person in the **same manner** that I treat all others? |
| Have I checked my **personal assumptions** about this client? |
| Have I clearly **communicated** program rules and expectations? |

Dignity and Respect for ALL