



47 Walnut Street,
Wellesley Hills, MA 02481
781-386-0633
Fax: 781-237-5020

130 Overland Rd
Waltham, Ma. 02451
781-386-0633
Fax: 781-736-7968

Information, Referral, Education, Supported Employment and Rehabilitation Services
Serving Central and Eastern Massachusetts

Diversity & Cultural Competency

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ASA is committed to expanding the participation rates of people of diverse backgrounds who have disabilities in advocacy efforts and every aspect of life. ASA celebrates its culture of diversity with both its staff and the individuals supported throughout the organization

Our commitment to equity, opportunity and inclusion for all people with disabilities has led ASA to become fully invested in empowering persons of diverse cultural, racial and ethnic backgrounds with disabilities and their families. Persons of diverse backgrounds with disabilities often face multiple barriers, including access to services and supports and discrimination in community, education and employment settings. Research indicates that, while people with disabilities face enhanced challenges, those of diverse backgrounds are disproportionately affected. They face higher incarceration rates, over-representation in segregated special education programs and diminished social and employment outcomes, among other things.

ASA recognizes the value of diversity and what it means to embrace cultural and linguistic competency. We believe individuals of diverse backgrounds must be supported by public and organizational policy and practices in order to achieve full inclusion. This acknowledgement, support and advocacy of diversity is essential to attaining positive outcomes for people with disabilities, and building a sense of community. For this reason, ASA contains in its policies and procedures, in its consumer handbook and in its participation in individual service plan team meetings and in its mission philosophy the connection of persons of diverse backgrounds with disabilities to the organizations, services and supports that lead to community inclusion and positive life outcomes.

ASA is committed to cultural and linguistic competency, and we have shed light on the issues, policies and practices that impact people of diverse backgrounds with disabilities. But real cultural competency isn't achieved through an article, event or webinar. It is achieved by embracing the differences in us all, celebrating our unique contributions and supporting equity in access, services and outcomes for all people.

ASA commitment to equity, opportunity and inclusion for people of diverse backgrounds with disabilities and their families in accessing services and supports offered by ASA and numerous other organizations.

Plan:

- 1) ASA reviews its cultural competency and diversity policy and plan annually within the context of its Accessibility and Strategic Plans which reviews on an annual basis the attitudinal issues of diversity, culture, age, gender, sexual orientation, spiritual beliefs, socioeconomic status, and language. If barriers in these areas are noted, recommendations for their remediation are made and implemented. In addition, our ongoing monthly staff meetings presented by management includes an orientation to diversity and cultural competency.
- 2) Some specific ongoing ASA staff training areas related to diversity and cultural competency include the following:
 - dietary restrictions such as, vegan, kosher meal, gluten free diets, low sugar diets, lactose free diets.
 - the observance of religious holidays and cultural customs regarding dress and communication.

- staff training in fulfilling the bathroom needs for participants;
- staff training in fulfilling restraint training needs.
- individual communication modalities, whether verbal, signing or dyno box or other electronic device or the use of picture books.
- The staff meetings review the individual cultural and diversity needs as mentioned above, and service plans take into consideration these specialized needs.

Therefore, the cultural and diversity plan for all staff and those served are addressed and integrated in ASA's personnel policies, program policies, accessibility plan, strategic plan, SWOT analysis and individual service plans for those served. As such cultural diversity and competency permeates the ethos of the entire organization.

Diversity Awareness

What is diversity?

Diversity includes all of the ways human beings are both alike and different. It allows us to connect with others that have the same characteristics and at the same time the ability to learn from one another about the differences and to value our commonalities and differences.

You and Your Similarities and Differences.

Internal	External	Organizational
Age	Religion	Department
Race	Income	Work Location
Gender and Gender Orientation	Personal and Recreational Habits	Management Status
Ethnicity	Educational background	Job Functions
Physical Ability	Marital status	

Cultural Norms and Values

Aspects Of Culture	Mainstream American Culture	Other Cultures
Communication & Language	Explicit and Direct	Implicit and Indirect
Food and Eating Habits	Eating is necessary-Fast food	Dining is a Social Experience, Religious Rules

Work Habits	Emphasis on Task	Emphasis on Relationships
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ASA has adopted the following definitions as the foundation for our Cultural Competency and Diversity Plan.

- Culture – The integrated pattern of human behavior that includes the thoughts, communication, actions, customs, beliefs, values, and intuitions of a racial, ethnic, religious, social or other group.
- Cultural Competency – An organization’s ability to recognize, respect, and address the unique needs, worth, thoughts, communications, actions, customs, beliefs, and values. ASA does not discriminate regarding race, religion, color, socio economics, national origin, citizenship, sex, sexual orientation, gender identity, age, ancestry, genetic information, veteran’s status, or status as a qualified individual with a disability, or any other characteristic protected by applicable Federal, State or Local law.

Overview

ASA seeks to improve the quality of life for all team members, volunteers, persons served, communities, and other organizations that interact with ASA. We expect to achieve this goal by educating and training our team members on diversity, equity, and inclusion enabling them to thrive in a dynamic and culturally diverse environment. Through this commitment, we will enhance our awareness, strengthen our ability to embrace differences and expand our skills to interact with others who are different than ourselves. Our ultimate goal is to demonstrate respect and understanding.

Embracing diversity, equity and inclusion in the workplace improves the workplace through creativity, acceptance, and innovation. It also broadens the range of knowledge, skills, and abilities of our team members. A workplace focused on diversity, equity and inclusion enables us to make richer decisions about programs and improves our ability to provide culturally appropriate services to the individuals we serve.

ASA vision for cultural-focused competent services is:

- ASA will effectively provide Mission services and programs to people of all cultures, races, ethnic backgrounds, socioeconomic, sexual orientation, spiritual beliefs, and religions in a manner that demonstrates value for the individuals, and communities we serve.
- Administrative services that provide support to the organization are developed and delivered in a manner that fosters a culturally competent workforce equipped to provide the highest level of quality services to everyone

Process and Practices

At ASA we are committed to practicing and embracing behavior that exemplifies thoughtful, caring approaches. Our goal is to consider the diversity of our stakeholders in all workforce development efforts.

To promote cultural diversity throughout the organization, ASA is engaged in the following activities:

Employment Programs

- ✓ Code of Ethics

Program Employment Practices

- ✓ Maintain Equal Opportunity Employment initiatives for hiring under-represented populations.
- ✓ Utilize behavior-based interviews designed to maintain objectivity and remove bias
- ✓ Utilize diverse sourcing methods and resources to attract a diverse candidate pool
- ✓ Conduct meetings with staff to discuss the organization's Strategic Plan and encourage team member engagement, which promotes and obtains feedback/input from team members.
- ✓ Ensure our reward and recognition programs are objective and fair.
- ✓ Training Team members, and participants on Cultural Competency and Diversity.
- ✓ Provide training to leaders on cultural and diversity competencies from internal and/or external resources.
- ✓ Routinely distribute professional literature to team members that relates to cultural competency and diversity. Assessments and Measurements
- ✓ Generate and review annual demographic reports on our workforce, the individuals we serve, team member programs, and stakeholder relationships.
- ✓ Conduct leader assessments as part of the learning experience to embrace differences in leadership styles and behaviors.

Recent organizational changes as a result of Autism Services Association Cultural Competency Plan includes the incorporation of Juneteenth as an organizational holiday and discussions and training around vaccine hesitancy.