

DIVERSITY POLICY

There is a myth that little human diversity exists in Vermont and it is, therefore, a place where a policy addressing diversity is not needed. This, of course, is denial of the truth and ignorance of the state's history. The University Center for Excellence on Developmental Disabilities (UCEDD), the Vermont Developmental Disabilities Council (VTDDC), and the Vermont Protection & Advocacy (P&A) Board has formulated the following as a definition of "diversity."

Definition of Diversity

Diversity is not a theory, but a reflection of everyone in the human family. Diversity includes those characteristics that span all dimensions of individual and societal experiences.

Diversity acknowledges the richness of our differences in a way that unites and celebrates our unique qualities. Diversity requires a commitment to creating a society designed to value rather than blend or diminish our individual or group distinctiveness, while still promoting our common bonds as people.

Dimensions of diversity include, but are not limited to, the following:

- * gender
- * race
- * sexual orientation
- * economic status
- * religion
- * language
- * nation of origin
- * physical, mental and behavioral ability
- * communication differences
- * learning differences
- * physical or mental health status
- * age

Too often, these human dimensions divide rather than bring people together and become the basis for discrimination. There are many types of discrimination - open and hidden, conscious and unconscious - all of which can and does interfere with all that

people attempt to accomplish. Thus, it is necessary to take a step by step, common sense approach to making this definition of diversity real.

In order to prevent the continued denial of diversity within this state, as well as other forms of discrimination, this policy directs action to take on three fronts – 1) membership within the UCEDD, VTDDC, and P&A; 2) knowledge and competence regarding diversity; and 3) design and delivery of services. Although our definition covers all forms of diversity, because of the continually changing demographics of our society, it is important to give particular attention to ethnic minorities in the implementation of this policy.

Goals

What follows are specific goals to promote diversity within the Administration for Developmental Disabilities (ADD) funded organizations (i.e., UAP, DDC, P&A Board) and associated councils.

Membership

The overarching goal is to maximize the diversity of membership of the UCEDD, VTDDC, and P&A Board. To this end, the VTDDC recommends that a plan be formulated to recruit individuals reflecting diverse membership (e.g., see definition of diversity above). A "nurturing" environment be consciously developed so all members representing diverse group membership feel welcomed, supported, and respected.

Knowledge and Competence Regarding Diversity

The goal is to promote awareness and sensitivity to, and competence regarding, diversity among all staff and volunteer affiliates of the organization. To this end, it is recommended that:

1. All members have the opportunity to explore their own biases, prejudices, cultural values and beliefs.
2. All members have the opportunity to explore expressions of diversity other than their own.
3. All members have the opportunity to be trained in conflict resolution around issues of diversity.
4. Training experiences will be initiated within the next year, and will be ongoing for all employees and associated volunteers to address the above three objectives.

Design and Delivery of Services

The goal is to conduct research and design and deliver service systems that are sensitive to the diverse needs of people with developmental disabilities and their families. To this end, it is recommended that:

1. Outreach and a continuing assessment of people with developmental disabilities and their families in Vermont be conducted to determine their differing needs that are unique to their socio-cultural background or situation.

VERMONT DEVELOPMENTAL DISABILITIES COUNCIL

2. Service design and delivery reflect the information derived from this assessment.
3. The VTDDC submits/selects grants that respect diversity.
4. Grant proposals submitted by or to the UCEDD, VTDDC, and P&A Board have a component that addresses issues of cultural and other types of diversity.
5. The organizations involved ensure that information they or their grantees produce and disseminate is presented in a format which is understandable by and respectful of recipients' diverse needs and dimensions.
6. Information that is disseminated by these organizations includes the promotion of diversity awareness, sensitivity, and competence of the general public.

[Adopted December 5, 1994.]