Quick Reference Handout 9.6: Ten Strategies for Inclusive HIV Community Planning

Introduction

A Ryan White HIV/AIDS Program (RWHAP) Part A Planning Council/Planning Body (PC/PB) is diverse by design. The legislation requires broad representation of consumers, service providers, and other community stakeholders. Both total membership and consumer membership is expected to be reflective of the local epidemic in terms of at least the following: race/ethnicity, gender, age, and any "disproportionately affected or historically underserved populations in the jurisdiction."[1]

Diverse consumer and community participation supports sound PC/PB decision making about services and use of funds. Such decisions can improve access to and quality of care, contributing to positive client outcomes including viral suppression. Diversity of viewpoints, thought patterns, and approaches to discussion and decision making leads to better decisions. As one Part A recipient explained in a recent national PC/PB assessment:

> *"The greatest benefit of having a planning council is that a group of stakeholders from various perspectives (funders, providers, consumers, etc.) meets regularly to address the HIV epidemic affecting our community, each member sharing their knowledge, experience, and ideas towards improving the local service delivery system, removing barriers in access to care, and collaboratively working to reduce new HIV infections and improve client health outcomes."[2]*

These positive results don't happen automatically, just because a PC/PB exists. They require significant, ongoing commitment and hard work by PC/PB leaders, members, PC/PB support staff, and recipient staff. Genuinely inclusive HIV community planning means that all members participate as engaged and equal partners, and diverse public input is regularly sought and used. Accomplishing this requires appropriate policies and procedures, orientation and training, and well-managed meetings with respectful interaction. This summary provides some concepts and strategies for creating and maintaining truly inclusive HIV community planning through inclusive PC/PB and committee meetings.
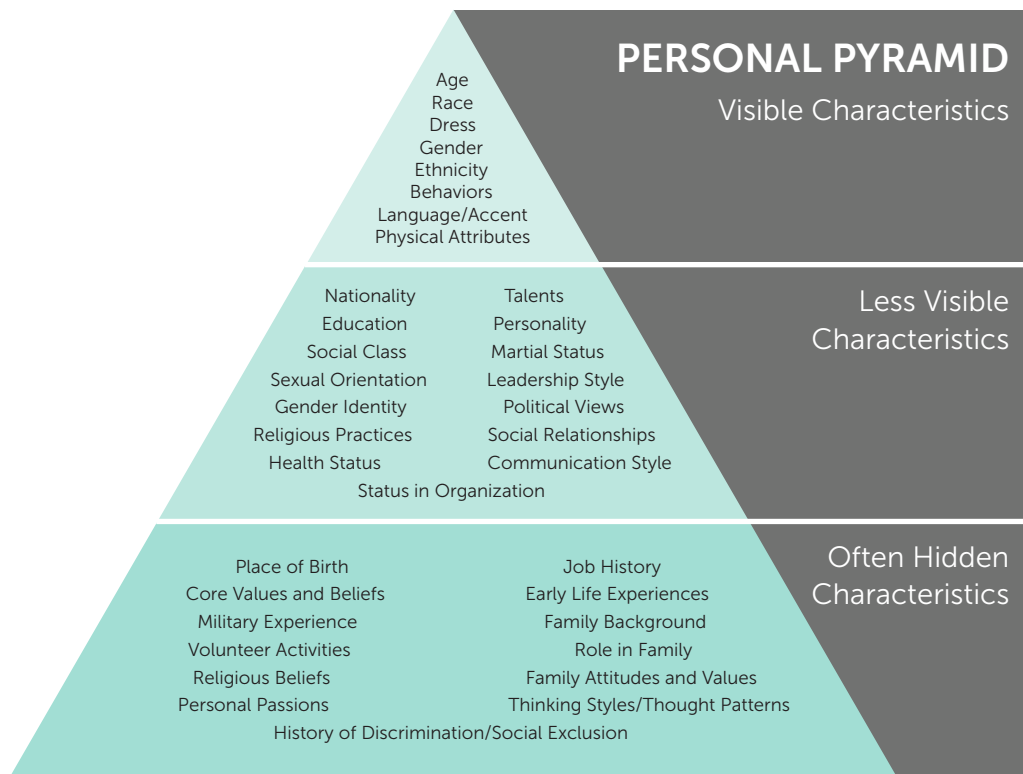
Components of Diversity

A PC/PB's members are diverse in many ways, all of which affect how members interact and work together. In looking at diversity, groups typically consider characteristics such as race, ethnicity, nationality, gender/gender identity, sexual orientation, and age. They may think in broad terms about differences in "culture"—social behaviors and norms—based on these characteristics. Attention to culture is very helpful, but every person has an individual relationship to culture. Assumptions about how someone will behave or react in a particular situation because of a characteristic such as race/ethnicity or sexual orientation are often incorrect.

Every individual is influenced by a complicated set of characteristics. Some are determined at birth and others developed or learned, some immediately visible and others largely invisible unless shared, some based on cultural background, others on genetics or life experience. The Personal Pyramid3 shown here suggests

some of these characteristics, all of which can affect how people interact. In working together, people tend to react first to the most visible characteristics in others—gender, race/ethnicity, language, age, dress. Over time, some of the less visible characteristics become known through joint activities—like a person's communication style—or through sharing—for example, talking about health status or experiences of discrimination or social exclusion. Some information may never be shared openly, but may still affect interactions—things like early life experiences, job history, and family background.

Every individual's Personal Pyramid is different. PC/PB members do not need to know everything about each other. They do need to be aware that both what they know and what they don't know may affect the group's interactions.

PERSONAL PYRAMID
Visible Characteristics

Age
Race
Dress
Gender
Ethnicity
Behaviors
Language/Accent
Physical Attributes

Less Visible Characteristics

Nationality   Talents
Education   Personality
Social Class   Martial Status
Sexual Orientation   Leadership Style
Gender Identity   Political Views
Religious Practices   Social Relationships
Health Status   Communication Style
Status in Organization

Often Hidden Characteristics

Place of Birth   Job History
Core Values and Beliefs   Early Life Experiences
Military Experience   Family Background
Volunteer Activities   Role in Family
Religious Beliefs   Family Attitudes and Values
Personal Passions   Thinking Styles/Thought Patterns
History of Discrimination/Social Exclusion

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Strategies for Inclusive Planning

Following are some ideas for establishing and maintaining an open, respectful, and inclusive environment within your PC/PB that encourages full participation by diverse members and by members of the community. Some of the strategies are directly related to diversity. Others support full participation by members who must connect remotely or face other barriers at meetings. Most of the examples come from PC/PBs.

1. **Adopt and enforce Bylaws, policies, Code of Conduct, and operating procedures that support inclusion.** Identify components of diversity important to your planning process, and be sure your guidance documents support them. For example:

   - If you want diverse leadership in terms of race and ethnicity, gender, and gender orientation, be sure your Bylaws require or encourage PC/PB and committee Co-Chair diversity.

   - If you consider unaligned consumer input essential, adopt quorum requirements that address not only total participation but also the presence of at least a specified number of unaligned consumers. For example, a quorum for the PC/PB meeting might include a majority of all members and a majority of unaligned consumer members.

   - If the PC/PB needs representation from a particular "disproportionately affected or historically underserved" population based on the local epidemic, be sure your open nominations process includes approaches for focusing on that group in recruitment, active outreach, and offers of training or mentoring. A jurisdiction might seek young MSM of color (age under 30), transgender PLWH, and/or African immigrants.

2. **Encourage both *cultural competence* and *cultural humility.***

   Cultural competence involves developing understanding of cultures other than your own. Such knowledge is important. However, when based on training sessions or academic learning rather than "lived experience," it can lead to stereotyping, or assuming that everyone from a particular cultural background has the same beliefs and behaviors.

   Cultural humility[4] focuses on increasing awareness of culture through ongoing personal reflection and co-learning along with people from other cultures. It means seeing people from other cultures as peers and trying to understand their views. It also encourages people from the dominant culture to recognize their own power, privileges, and biases (which are often unconscious).

   When trying to understand "the unique experience of any given individual, cultural competence is theory, cultural humility is practice."[5] Both concepts can help PC/PB members understand and respect each other. People from every cultural group need to learn about other groups. Here are some ways PC/PBs can address this:

   - Provide training designed to ensure that everyone feels welcome. Provide separate interactive sessions throughout the year, focusing on race/ethnicity, sexual orientation, and sexual identity. Engage members from these groups in planning the training.

   - Ask members from different cultural backgrounds to role play situations where they have felt stereotyped or misunderstood, and also responses that can increase understanding.

   - Ask service providers and consumers from different cultural groups to share ways to increase cultural understanding.

- Bring in a trained facilitator to help members explore conscious and unconscious cultural biases and learn how to overcome them in diverse planning groups.

- Be sure your Code of Conduct requires respectful interactions and includes the expectation that all members are responsible for following and enforcing it.

3. **Build relationships among PC/PB members.** Productive, effective PC/PBs do not focus only on completing tasks. They typically spend time on getting to know each other – including learning how culture affects their behaviors and interactions. They spend time building trust and mutual respect, so that everyone feels comfortable working together and providing input. Cultural differences become less important when members know and trust each other and the process. A couple of strategies:

- At every monthly PC/PB meeting, have three members spend a total of 15 minutes sharing why they joined the planning body, what they hope to accomplish, and what they would most like other members to know about them. Make assignments a month ahead, so members have time to prepare.

- If the PC/PB or committee meets during mealtime, use that time for getting better acquainted through formal or informal discussion.

4. **Be aware of culture when managing discussion and conflict.** Encourage honest discussion while respecting cultural norms. Use approaches that address situations where cultural barriers to full participation may exist—for example, where women may be expected to defer to men, young adults may be uncomfortable taking the lead when other members are considerably older, or new members may be uncomfortable stating disagreements publicly. For example:

- Ensure participation by going around the room and asking each member in turn to present their views on an issue or their suggestion for resolving a problem.

- At the beginning of the planning year, hold a discussion about how the group will handle discussions and conflict. Emphasize that disagreements can be productive. Have the group consciously review and adopt a Code of Conduct that requires everyone to treat others with respect and that disagreements focus on the issue, not the individual.

- During meetings, divide people into small groups of 2-3 to brainstorm, and then have one person from each small group report those ideas back to the full group.

- To encourage full participation, especially when some members are new, split members into small groups of similar age or status within the group; have someone summarize the discussion, with or without names attached.

- Discuss cultural differences openly, and ask members what will make them more comfortable sharing their ideas. Remember, culturally-based behaviors are not permanently fixed; people can adapt if they see the value of change and are in a respectful and comfortable environment.

5. **Use professional interpretation to fully engage members who have limited English proficiency or are deaf.** Your PC/PB has a responsibility to ensure that all members can participate fully in planning. Many jurisdictions have laws requiring use of a trained interpreter. Sometimes the requirement is limited to commonly needed languages. Such jurisdictions often have language access contractors. The challenge is to ensure that they are professionally trained, familiar with HIV and RWHAP terminology, and have needed equipment.

In a PC/PB that includes multiple members with limited English proficiency (LEP) but the same native language, the most effective approach is to provide *simultaneous interpretation* by trained interpreters. In simultaneous interpretation, the interpreter converts discussion to a second language while the speaker is talking, so it is heard in "real time." In consecutive interpretation, the interpreter listens to the discussion and then summarizes it every few minutes, when the speaker pauses or finishes talking. *Consecutive interpretation* is far less effective and more disruptive when the intent is to have everyone participate, not just listen to the process. Some members learn what was said a few minutes after everyone else, and often the discussion has moved on, so that their comments are no longer relevant. Use of headphones ensures that members can hear the interpreter without disruption to the process. Ideally, all members wear headphones, so everyone hears all the discussion as it occurs in their own language. However, this option is not always affordable. Here are some effective strategies for addressing linguistic diversity:

- Rent or purchase earphones if they are not otherwise available—or see if a provider or other nonprofit can lend them to the PC/PB.

- Be sure that background materials available in Spanish (like the *Planning Council Primer*) are provided to members who are more comfortable in that language.

- If some members speak and understand English, but may read and comprehend it more slowly than native speakers, be sure to send out materials prior to the meeting and avoid introducing new documents at the meetings.

- Provide important materials in the preferred language of members where possible—consider budgeting funds for translation.

- Consult with providers and organizations serving these communities for advice on the best way to meet their interpretation needs, and educate the entire PC/PB.

6. **Recognize and address gender bias,** the sometimes-unconscious belief that "men have more to contribute." In many jurisdictions, far more men than women have HIV, and this can contribute to a focus on the needs and priorities of male PLWH. Research shows that in many work and civic situations, men sometimes receive credit for ideas first raised by women. Consumer committees or PLWH caucuses are sometimes primarily male, and sometimes women feel unwelcome. These situations can occur even where women are well represented as providers, including case managers. Researchers have documented that women in the workplace who speak in meetings are far more likely than men to be interrupted, and their ideas are often taken less seriously.[6] PC/PBs can address this issue in many ways including:

- Adopt and enforce a Code of Conduct to prevent members from interrupting each other or "talking over each other."

- Foster an environment in which all members are expected to "call out" behaviors that show gender bias.

- Assign a PC/PB officer or some other individual responsibility for talking individually with members who frequently show gender bias.

- Help "level the playing field" by going around the room to get input from everyone.

- Be sure that members who make valuable suggestions receive credit for their ideas in discussions and minutes.

7. **Use the terms members prefer when referring to them.** People differ in how they want to be described, whether that means the name of their racial or ethnic group, cultural group, or gender/gender identity. In an inclusive PC/PB, everyone respects the words people use to describe themselves. Members should feel comfortable reminding others of these preferences—and being reminded. PC/PB leaders can help all members understand why these terms are important to people, ask what terms individual members prefer, and encourage use of these terms consistently in referring to them. For example:

   • Have someone from an LGBTQ provider give an orientation to appropriate pronouns at a PC/PB meeting.[7]

   • At the first meeting for new members, spend a few minutes discussing why these terms matter and ask both new and veteran members to share their preferred terms—and the terms that bother them and why.

   • Refer to members by their preferred gender or gender-neutral pronoun—*she/her/hers, he/him/his, they/them/theirs.* Some PC/PB members and staff put their preferred pronouns on their email signatures or tent cards.

   • Ask about preferred language for members of racial and ethnic groups. There are regional, generational, and personal differences in preference for *Latino* versus *Hispanic* and *African American* versus *Black*; many RWHAP programs use both. Many people prefer to be referred to by their nationality group rather than some larger racial or ethnic identifier (e.g., Mexican, Haitian, Thai) or by a regional term (*South Asian, Caribbean, African*).

   • Use *deaf*, *hard of hearing*, or another term as preferred by PC/PB members of that community.

   • Ask transgender members what terms they prefer (*transgender, trans*, or another term).

8. **Recognize and address power dynamics.** In a health planning context, power involves the ability of an individual or group to influence the actions of others. Power dynamics involve the way different individuals or groups of people interact with each other in PC/PB situations when some have (or are perceived to have) more power than others. Some groups of members may be powerful because their affiliations involve access to resources and/or influence on services. For example, consumers may see provider and recipient representatives as powerful—and this is likely to affect interactions. They may also bring a lot of knowledge and experience that a community member rarely has. In addition, some members are seen as powerful based on a combination of characteristics like race/ethnicity, gender, education, income or wealth, and employment/profession.

   Sometimes this plays out through behavior in a PC/PB or committee meeting—leading or trying to direct discussion or debate even if they are not chairing the meeting, strongly advocating for a particular decision, talking more than other members, and/or seeming to discourage or ignore input from members with less power. If permitted on a regular basis, such behavior creates a sense of inequality that negatively affects participation and decision making. PC/PBs may be described as "dominated" by a particular group, and other members become unwilling to challenge the recommendations of powerful members. Most often, consumers with limited prior experience in community planning are the most negatively affected. Even where members receive a lot of training and mentoring, unacknowledged and uncontrolled power dynamics prevent inclusive planning. Addressing this challenge requires both acknowledging that differences in power exist and taking action to reduce their impact on discussion and decision making. For example:

- Address this issue directly in orientation and training, emphasizing the importance of full participation by all members and the value of consumers input, acknowledging the existence of power dynamics, and describing actions PC/PB and committee leaders will be taking to "level the playing field."

- Follow *Robert's Rules of Order* guidance that "No member can speak twice on the same issue until everyone else wishing to speak has spoken to it once."

- Include in the Code of Conduct—and consistently enforce—measures that help address power differentials, like requiring individuals to wait to be recognized before speaking and to address everyone with respect.

- Train new leaders to recognize and address problematic behavior when chairing a meeting.

- Make all members responsible for identifying and speaking out when an individual or group tries to control or limit debate or decision making.

9. **Encourage full participation from quieter members.** Some people are "extroverted thinkers"—they are very comfortable stating an opinion about an issue within a few seconds after it is raised. Others are "introverted thinkers"—they like to think about the issue before they offer their ideas. People who "think on their feet" are not necessarily smarter than other members and do not necessarily provide the most valuable input. However, unconscious bias does exist, and such members often dominate discussion simply because they are always ready to talk. If quieter members struggle to be heard or see that their views are not being sought, they may become less involved or even leave the PC/PB. Use of small groups can help in such situations, as can some additional approaches. For example:

- Share the agenda and materials several days in advance, so quieter members have time to review and consider the issues before the meeting.

- Be sure all members sit around the same table, so they can be seen and heard.

- Before beginning discussion, ask members to think for a minute and write down their main ideas. This gives everyone time to consider the issue and be ready to share. It also tends to improve the quality of responses from the extroverts.

- Don't allow members to be interrupted while speaking.

- Where opinions from everyone are needed, go around the room or call on members individually.

- Acknowledge the value of the ideas provided by quieter members. Positive reinforcement increases confidence.

- If some members don't seem to really listen to other members, eliminate distractions by making no-tablet or no-smartphone rules. Proactively ask remote members if they want to provide input on the topic under discussion. Do it at the beginning or in the middle of the discussion of each agenda item, not just at the end. Agree with remote members on how they should ask to be recognized, perhaps by asking a staff member to monitor the connections and ensure they are immediately heard.

10. **Fully involve members who participate remotely.** Small groups like committees can often meet productively via electronic methods—telephone conference calls or technology that provides both audio and video. It is much harder to make a meeting inclusive when most people are in the same room but a few are connecting remotely. Often, the remote participants have trouble hearing the discussion and are largely ignored. If remote participation is unavoidable, focus on including those remote members in the discussion. Here are some strategies for doing this:

    - Be sure remote participants receive all meeting materials. If new materials must be presented at the meeting, send them via email immediately.

    - Support and encourage use of technology that allows the remote members to see and hear other members. Invest in technology like multiple microphones so that remote members can hear all the discussion, and so members can hear them. Use that technology to "share" materials on screen so they can see documents as they are discussed. Where feasible, provide a remote facility that has audio/visual technology. For members with computers who must frequently connect remotely (for example, members from outlying counties), consider providing low-cost webcams so they can see and hear the discussion.

References

1 See instructions for the PC/PB Reflectiveness and Roster Chart submitted by Part A programs as part of their 2019 Program Terms Report and Program Submission. See https://targethiv.org/library/FY18-APR-FY19-PTR.

2 Response from a Part A recipient responding to the Voluntary Request for Information (VRI) as part of the 2016 assessment of PC/PBs conducted for the HIV/AIDS Bureau's Division of Metropolitan HIV/AIDS Programs (HAB/DMHAP) by EGM Consulting, LLC.

3 Developed by EGM Consulting, LLC, 2019.

4 The concept was developed by Melanie Teryalon and Jann Murray-Garcia in 1998 as a way of making multiculturalism a part of their work as healthcare professionals.

5 Craig Moncho,"Cultural Humility, Part II – Promoting Cultural Humility in the Workplace," The Social Work Practitioner, Blog posted August 26, 2013. See https://thesocialworkpractitioner.com/2013/08/26/cultural-humility-part-ii-promoting-cultural-humility-in-the-workplace/

6 See for example, Renee Cullinan, "Run Meetings That are Fair to Introverts, Women, and Remote Workers," Harvard Business Review, April 29, 2016. Available at https://hbr.org/2016/04/run-meetings-that-are-fair-to-introverts-women-and-remote-workers.

7 The University of Wisconsin at Milwaukee LGBT Resource Center's very short "Pronouns – a How To Guide" is a useful resource. See https://uwm.edu/lgbtrc/support/gender-pronouns/.