

**National Veterans' Technical Assistance Center (NVTAC)
Homeless Veterans' Reintegration Program (HVRP) Community of Practice (CoP)
Diversity, Equity, Inclusion, and Accessibility (DEIA)
Monday, October 31, 2022, 3:00–4:00 p.m. ET**

Presenters

Sarah Chung, NVTAC Coach
Steve Dudasik, NVTAC Coach
Jenn Steigerwald, NVTAC Coach

Key Points

- **Introduction**
 - Sarah Chung welcomed grantees to the October HVRP CoP event on DEIA. Sarah asked attendees to introduce themselves in the Zoom chat.
 - This session provided an opportunity for grantees to learn about successful delivery methods and best practices for helping reduce disparities in the homeless system.
- **Disparities in the Homeless System**
 - Sarah first acknowledged the inherent biases and experiences the coaches and participants bring to the discussion on DEIA and invited participants to share their experiences at the end of the presentation.
 - The National Alliance to End Homelessness estimates that 580,466 people in the United States are currently experiencing homelessness. This number is a snapshot, as requested by the Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD), and not an exact figure. This number serves HUD as a baseline for funding and other opportunities.
 - Most minority groups in the United States experience higher rates of homelessness than their white counterparts, creating a disproportionate homelessness rate. African Americans make up 13 percent of the general population but more than 40 percent of those experiencing homelessness. The same disproportionality is true for those identifying as two or more races, American Indian/Alaska Native, and Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander.
 - HUD estimates 40,056 veterans are experiencing homelessness on any given night. While only 7 percent of the general population can claim veteran status, nearly 13 percent of the homeless adult population are veterans.
 - The same disproportionality of people of color present in the general homeless population is true for the population of veterans experiencing homelessness, according to data from the National Center for Veterans Analysis and Statistics.
 - Racial disparities can be compounded by other intersections such as being lesbian, bisexual, transgender, or questioning (LGBTQ+), or a person living with a disability, which adds another layer of difficulty and discrimination. This intersectionality can make life much harder when experiencing homelessness.

- **What is DEIA?**
 - Steve Dudasik began by asking participants to consider how each of the elements he was going to explain might play out within their organizations and how each attribute of DEIA might be contributing to creating an environment that is safe, inclusive, and celebrates differences.
 - Diversity is the practice of including many communities, identities, races, ethnicities, backgrounds, abilities, cultures, and beliefs—in the context of the workplace as we apply it.
 - Equity is the consistent, systematic, fair, just, and impartial treatment of all individuals. How is your organization treating its individuals? The goal is the nonbiased treatment of everyone within your workplace and within the system they are experiencing.
 - Inclusion is the recognition, appreciation, and use of the talents and skills of employees of all backgrounds. It celebrates the differences, skillsets, and experiences of each person in the workplace. When inclusivity is prioritized, people feel safe, engaged with, and valued by their workplace.
 - Accessibility is the design, construction, development, and maintenance of facilities, information and communication technology, programs, and services so that all people, including people with disabilities, can fully and independently use them. According to the Americans with Disabilities Act, the workplace needs to be designed in a way that everyone has equal access to be successful. This applies to promotions or other career opportunities.
 - Shelters must be accessible, and thought must be put in to how your Continuum of Care is promoting accessibility.
- **Equal Employment Opportunity (EEO) Act**
 - There are often misconceptions about the differences between the EEO Act and DEIA.
 - Under the EEO Act, all people have the inalienable right to work and have opportunities for career growth/advancement based on merit and skills. The goal is a meritocracy with EEO guidelines.
 - There must be no discrimination due to race/color, identity (sexual/cultural), beliefs, and age—including populations traditionally underrepresented in the workforce, such as women, minorities, people with disabilities, and others. Included within others are those who have experienced or are currently experiencing homelessness. Additionally, we consider veterans who are moving back into community life.
 - Looking at local populations, grantees will want to ensure that everyone in their community—regardless of background—has an equal right and opportunity to gain employment, achieve their desired outcomes, and grow in their positions without any bias or negativity.
 - Finally, it is important to consider and protect the interview process and ensure that bias or negativity does not have undue influence.

- **Elements of DEIA-Positive EEO Programs**
 - All organizations have EEO plans (or should). DEIA creates a baseline for how your organization is moving forward regarding your corporate culture.
 - First, there needs to be a top-down commitment to EEO, diversity, and inclusion. Everyone, including the Chief Executive Officer, directors, and management staff must be engaged, on board, and committed to DEIA principles.
 - Integrating a statement about DEIA into the company mission can ensure it becomes a part of the culture. Coaches have worked with leadership and clinical staff to add statements promoting DEIA and EEO positivity. This is a highly recommended practice as it is very effective in creating program accountability.
 - Proactive prevention of discrimination includes access for employees to contact their human resources department. Complaints should be addressed promptly. The organization must be willing and committed to act on any discrimination feedback they receive and implement a process where it is prevented from reoccurring.
 - Finally, the organization must be responsive to all employees. Celebrating differences and individuals should be a goal.
- **How does DEIA Fit Under EEO?**
 - EEO is legislative language that has existed since 1965 as part of the Civil Rights Act. It is federal law. DEIA is non-legislative, as it is the result of an executive order.
 - DEIA is a way of implementing EEO and sets up organizations for successfully following EEO's laws.
 - EEO compliance standards often serve as a baseline to create a DEIA-positive corporate culture. Organizations must look at EEO standards and identify how to operationalize those guidelines.
- **Disparities in Employment**
 - Jenn Steigerwald began the discussion on employment disparities by addressing microaggressions.
 - Microaggressions are subtle but detrimental actions directed at targeted groups that are stigmatized or historically marginalized. This term is used broadly. They may be verbal, behavioral, or environmental and may be intentional or unintentional.
 - Microaggressions are based on a simple, demeaning idea: "Because you are X, you probably are/are not or like/do not like Y." These broad, generalized assumptions about an entire group of people can influence workplace interactions.
 - Microaggressions can create a hostile environment that is unsafe, unhealthy, and unpleasant for people of those groups to work in.
- **Hiring Bias**
 - Hiring bias is a skepticism, opinion, or feeling about a person when deciding if they are a good fit for a job.
 - These opinions and feelings could be based on the person's name, appearance, accent, abilities, gender identity, culture, or living situation. These are often not

communicated aloud but influence decisions around hiring. It all comes down to assumptions based on internalized bias.

- Hiring bias is a significant detriment to those going through the interview and hiring processes.
- **Practical Applications**
 - How do we start combatting these issues and create a workplace that promotes DEIA culture?
 - Creating a safe space—Employees, coworkers, or veterans being served should be able to come to a place of service and feel safe from targeting and hostility.
 - Equitable access to services—There should be a no “wrong door approach.” Organizations should not be weeding people out based on factors that do not impact eligibility. If someone is eligible, they should be served equally.
 - DEIA training for all staff—This should not be a one-time event. Organizations need to be able to implement new ideas and approaches and then revisit DEIA principles to evaluate their practices and challenges.
 - Hiring staff with lived experience—Individuals who have experienced homelessness can speak to others based on their experience. Organizations should ensure they hear the voices of the people these decisions impact. Including the voices and experiences of people from these communities is essential.
 - Data dive with a plan for change without resistance—While a data dive can discover what might be going wrong, a plan for change ensures that this data becomes actionable policy.
 - Have DEIA language in the mission statement—This seemingly small thing can be very impactful. It centers DEIA principles at the core of the work done throughout the entire agency.
 - Lead and manage with DEIA ideals—DEIA should be the organization’s cornerstone, immersed into its daily practices.

Discussion and Q&A

- **Discussion Question:** What is your commitment to DEIA? How are you already implementing or considering DEIA principles?
 - **Grantee Response:** It is challenging to recognize that the veterans served experience intersections of marginalization because it is often something they attempt to conceal. It is important to respect their decision and not judge them as their provider. However, I noticed discipline issues within my organization’s human resources department that are not fully addressed. Organizations must be culturally competent to address these biases.
 - **Grantee Response:** An examination of the possibility of one’s own biases is necessary. It should be considered daily.

- **NVTAC Comment:** It is hard work to create a safe environment that is radically encouraging staff and colleagues to look at their biases and have a safe space where they can converse about it.
- **NVTAC Comment:** In the past, I (Sarah) worked at various youth shelters across the country. One thing I considered at each of them was looking at the various “ban books”—the three-ring notebooks that include all the individuals who were banned from accessing the services the shelter offers. In one shelter in Omaha, Nebraska, I noticed that most youths in this ban book were nonwhite. This uncomfortable correlation was also true in the Bay Area shelters where I worked. I ask each shelter to challenge themselves about their banning policies.
- **Grantee Response:** I worked at an agency that had a list of clients who could not return to the facility, which was like the ban book Sarah mentioned.
- **NVTAC Comment:** When I (Steve) worked in New York, I noticed a disproportionality in the referral process. It is helpful to consider how people find and access your organization. Are the referrals in your database proportionate to the homeless community you serve?
- **Grantee Response:** I appreciated the side-by-side comparison of DEIA and EEO. Most of my organization’s executive team understands the EEO legislation but not necessarily how to view DEIA in an illuminating way.
- **NVTAC Comment:** It is always important to consider accessibility issues that might impede people from receiving their organization’s services.

Conclusion

- NVTAC will be revisiting this topic in the future and posted a survey in the chat.
- The slides and recording will be posted on the [NVTAC Community of Practice webpage](#).
- Grantees can contact NVTAC directly with any questions at contact@nvtac.org.