

**National Veterans' Technical Assistance Center (NVTAC)
Homeless Veterans' Reintegration Program (HVRP) Community of Practice (CoP)
Diversity, Equity, Inclusion, and Accessibility (DEIA): Practical Applications
Thursday, April 27, 2023, 3 – 4 p.m. ET**

NVTAC Staff

Jenn Steigerwald, NVTAC Coach

Steve Dudasik, NVTAC Coach

Sarah Chung, NVTAC Coach

Key Points

- **Introduction**
 - NVTAC coaches welcomed grantees to the April 2023 HVRP CoP event.
 - NVTAC reminded attendees that if they hear a great idea or best practice from another grantee that they would like to consider implementing in their programs, they should always talk to their Grant Officer's Technical Representative (GOTR).
 - **Liberated Spaces Agreement:** NVTAC started the session with a liberated space agreement, which originated from [ThirdSpace Action Lab](#) in Cleveland, Ohio. NVTAC encouraged everyone on the call to assume unconditional positive intent among fellow attendees. NVTAC reminded attendees to be attentive to both words and tone throughout the session to help everyone feel safe and comfortable participating and sharing.
- **Overview of October's CoP DEIA**
 - On October 31, 2023, NVTAC facilitated a CoP to establish the basic principles of DEIA. The presentation and recording can be found here: [Archived CoP Sessions – National Veterans' Technical Assistance Center \(nvtac.org\)](#)
 - **Microaggressions:**
 - Microaggressions are subtle but very harmful actions directed at targeted groups of people. Microaggressions can be verbal, behavioral, or even environmental.
 - It is important that we are all aware of our own use of microaggressions and can identify them as they occur.
 - Microaggressions are based on a demeaning idea and can occur in many ways.
 - For example: “Because you are X, you probably are/are not or like/do not like Y.”
 - **Hiring Bias:**
 - Hiring bias is a doubt, opinion, or suspicion about a person when deciding if they are a good fit for a job.
 - Those opinions and thoughts could be based on a person's name, culture, accent, appearance, gender identity, living situation, or abilities. These

things have nothing to do with an individual's ability to complete the tasks of that job or their capacity to fit the needs of the role.

- **Practical Applications:**

- Integrating DEIA is about developing a cultural shift within your organization, where everyone feels welcome and comfortable.
- Create a space to speak freely with respect among your colleagues and with the veterans you serve in your facility.
- These conversations can be uncomfortable. Moving towards inclusivity means working through the discomfort and growing pains by having hard conversations about inequities, disparities, and privilege.
- Encourage people to acknowledge that this is a challenging topic to discuss or think about while acknowledging the necessity to discuss it.
- Ensure the services you provide are delivered equitably.
- Provide DEIA training for all staff and new hires to ensure everyone has a baseline understanding and competency.
- Hiring staff with lived experiences ensures that the available services are informed by the people using the service.
- Look at hiring data and practices to identify trends or areas of opportunity with a plan for change to ensure staff diversity.
- Embed DEIA language into the mission statement so staff members can be mission-focused.
- If an organization is committed to DEIA, implementation and management are based on those ideals. When management emphasizes the importance of DEIA, those values will trickle down to direct service staff and the veterans you serve.

- **Things to be Aware Of**

- There must be proactive recruitment strategies to hire a diverse workforce.
- Review current hiring processes to ensure they are non-discriminatory and create a welcoming workplace environment to encourage employee retention.
- It is important to address microaggressions with a feedback loop that immediately addresses the action.

- **Examples of Practical Applications**

- **Proactive recruitment strategies:** Develop a talent pipeline for your organization by conducting outreach to educational institutions and entities that represent a diverse population and people with different experiences.
- **Microaggressions:** Intentional or non-intentional statements that communicate in a hostile, hurtful, or derogatory way towards a marginalized or stigmatized group.
 - **Discussion Question:** How have you observed microaggressions, and how do you ensure they are addressed?
 - **Grantee response:** Dr. Daryl Wing Sue wrote a book on the topic and gets all the credit, but an African American Harvard

University psychiatrist named Chester M. Pierce coined the term in the 1970s. Once while attending a meeting with other providers, a person from another agency asked to speak to the administrator of HVRP, assuming that the person he was speaking with was not the administrator of HVRP. I had to explain to him that I was the administrator of HVRP. I don't know whether he assumed that because I'm a woman, African American, or both. It can be effective to address microaggressions head-on.

- **Grantee response:** Some people tend to speak over or interrupt others. I had to speak to a staff member about doing this habitually to address this microaggression.
- **NVTAC response:** It is not always Black, Indigenous, and People of Color's (BIPOC) responsibility to call out and identify microaggressions that occur against them; it's everyone's responsibility to identify and address microaggressions as they occur around us.
- **Safe Work Environments:** Creating an inclusive and safe work environment helps employees and clients feel more comfortable, secure, and at ease regarding their physical and emotional safety.
 - **Discussion Question:** How have you set up safe workspaces, and what do they include?
 - **Grantee response:** My chief executive officer (CEO) is a stickler for respecting those we serve. What they say should be honored and trusted rather than questioned and interrogated. Someone in leadership laying that foundation of respect is great because those values tend to go from the top down to the veterans being served.
 - **Grantee response:** Having a private area for assessments is great to ensure the veteran has privacy to share sensitive topics.
 - **NVTAC response:** A feedback loop with the veterans we serve in the form of a survey or focus group where we ask them what a safe space means to them will help take a veteran-centered approach.
- **Creating Intentional and Lasting Partnerships:** Our work is best done when working with our community partnerships to leverage resources. Ensuring community partners are aligned with HVRP's values and mission is a great strategy to ensure a robust and long-term partnership.
 - **Discussion Question:** How have you created intentional and lasting partnerships?
 - **Grantee response:** Inviting partner agencies and employers to give presentations and talk with the veterans directly helps make those we serve more comfortable and relaxed. Inviting partners helps the veterans ask questions and slows the process down so that it is a less intimidating and more patient process.

- **Grantee response:** Hosting a Stand Down event that includes many services from the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (VA), healthcare organizations, service providers, and employers.
- **NVTAC response:** Creating lasting and intentional partnerships is a win-win for both parties involved. The more we collaborate with our partners, the more help and resources we can offer our veterans that HVRP may not provide.

Conclusion

Integrating DEIA is about developing a cultural shift from within, where everyone feels welcome and comfortable. This culture must be endorsed and implemented from the management levels of an organization so it trickles down to service delivery staff and is successful. NVTAC discussed proactive recruitment, microaggressions, creating a safe work environment, and intentional and lasting partnerships. No responses were received when NVTAC asked the grantees about proactive recruitment strategies. NVTAC realizes that CoP attendees may not be involved in recruitment activities for the organizations they work for. However, NVTAC plans to discuss proactive recruitment techniques related to employer engagement in more detail in future technical assistance activities and events to establish if there is value in exploring this topic further.

This DEIA CoP helps establish foundational knowledge to continue these discussions during the Virtual Learning Course (VLC) series scheduled between May 2 – 11, 2023. Each session in the VLC series will provide an in-depth discussion of an underserved population, the barriers they face when accessing and utilizing HVRP services, and an overview of solutions and best practices to serve each population. NVTAC will cover the following topics:

- 1) Underserved Populations Overview;
- 2) Serving Youth and Seniors in HVRP;
- 3) Serving Individuals with Mental Health and Physical Health Challenges in HVRP; and
- 4) Serving Women and People of Color in HVRP.

For more information, please visit www.nvtac.org.

You can review the presentation through the following link: [NVTAC April 2023 Community of Practice](#)