“Voices of Our Elders”

Bridging the Cultural Gap

Site Manager’s Workshop: October 2006
Juneau, AK
Developing Cultural Competencies

“Communications is never perfect and always approximate.” (Father Michael Oleksa)

Introductions:

Presenters and participants

Expectations and Challenges of the Topic

Overview of syllabus/agenda – Interactive
Concept – “First, know yourself.”

• In order to effectively communicate cross culturally, or intra-culturally, first have a grounded understanding of yourself as an individual.

• It is important to understand your cultural strengths and challenges

• Begin a journey of adding to your cultural knowledge.
Know yourself, continued

• It is important to understand what your traditional values are and

• Do they complement or are different from those traditional values of elders?

• Some come from a traditional background while others are on a continuum towards assimilation.
Know yourself, continued

- Some care providers are from a Western/European culture and

- It is equally important to get to know and understand their cultural background and

- Even their organizational culture.
Know yourself, continued

• Understanding these practical ideas can be the beginning of developing your own cultural competencies and

• Will improve your communications with elders that you and other agencies that provide a service to them.
Become a Cultural Navigator

• We are a nation of many transitory peoples. Alaska is no exception.

• Elders and their families have been moving within and outside of their historical place of birth and traditional residences for many years.

• Some become elders “in place” but find that their care giver is from another culture, time and place.

• These realities can stress out effective cross cultural communications.

Here are some cultural differences between Indigenous people and western/European people:
**Dichotomy of Cultural Characteristics**

“No one culture is better than the other, just different”

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Indigenous Culture</th>
<th>Western Culture</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Spirituality</td>
<td>Christianity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Slow to Trust</td>
<td>Quick to make friends</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Respect for Nature</td>
<td>Dominion over environment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Respect for Elders</td>
<td>Youth focused</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### Cultural Characteristics, Continued

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Silence</th>
<th>Talk too much and loudly</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Little or no Eye Contact</td>
<td>Looking directly, Staring</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Respectful speech</td>
<td>Talk too fast</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Want to know who you are</td>
<td>Want to get the job done</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Handshake soft</td>
<td>Handshake firm</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Avoidance of conflict</td>
<td>Adversarial relationship</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Cultural Characteristics, continued

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Community focused</th>
<th>Individual focused (rights)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Consensus building</td>
<td>Authoritative; “The Boss”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Triangulation</td>
<td>Direct talk</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Oral tradition</td>
<td>Literature, Forms, writing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Extended family</td>
<td>Nuclear family</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
# Cultural Characteristics, continued

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Present oriented</th>
<th>Future oriented</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ecological knowledge</td>
<td>Scientific knowledge</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“Yes” can mean ?</td>
<td>“I understand you”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Native time</td>
<td>Western time</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Body language</td>
<td>Various</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Cross-Cultural Communication Strategies between Senior Site Managers and Elders:

• Seek out appropriate community protocols

• Engage in “Active Listening”

• Look for cultural communication cues

• Develop rapport before engaging in “business”
Communication Strategies, continued

• Humor reduces barriers to communication

• Leave your biases at the door

• Use translators/interpreters

• Demonstrate some knowledge of the elders culture

• Bring small gifts
Communication Strategies, continued

• Traditional Native foods-sometimes you may invited by the elder to have food with them

• Speak softer and slower

• Allow for cultural pauses in speech, do not interrupt

• Learn about historical traumas among Native American Elders
Communication Strategies, continued

• Develop cultural understanding of the body dynamics & attitudes:
  – Aches and pains: Some elders may minimize their level of pain
  – Power, motion
  – Acuity
  – Some elders are very trusting & sometimes want the health care providers to make decisions for them when there are choices of treatment
Bridging the Gap

• Remember the cultural protocol

• Demonstrating respect by listening to our elders

• Learn their language, sometimes only a few key words demonstrates your sincerity

• Learn their tribal history

• If possible get your elders to tell their life stories- Healing through remembrance
National Resource Center

American Indians, Alaska Natives & Native Hawaiian Elders

"Voices of Our Elders"

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