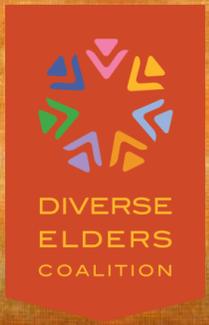


Diverse Elders Coalition Principles of Inclusion and Engagement



Since 2010, members of the Diverse Elders Coalition (DEC) have played a leading role in articulating the needs and challenges of elder communities that do not often get heard in policy debates, including elders of color, American Indian/ Alaska Native (AI/ AN) elders, and LGBT elders. The collective experiences these organizations have directly working with a broad cross-section of elder communities, often among the most disenfranchised among them, give DEC members an authoritative voice to speak individually and collectively about how best to engage diverse elder communities.

The DEC member organizations include:

- National Asian Pacific Center on Aging (NAPCA)
- National Hispanic Council on Aging (NHCOA)
- National Indian Council on Aging (NICOA)
- Services & Advocacy for GLBT Elders (SAGE)
- Southeast Asia Resource Action Center (SEARAC)

In anticipation of the White House Conference on Aging (WHCOA), the DEC and its members have prepared the following set of recommendations to increase inclusion and engagement for diverse communities of elders. In our experience, these practices reflect lessons learned in how to ensure that those who are often the most disenfranchised can best claim their seat at the table.

Inclusion

As the saying goes, “if you don’t have a seat at the table, chances are you’re on the menu.” The overreliance on “the usual suspects” and staying within traditional networks leaves out underserved communities such as communities of color, immigrants, AI/ AN elders, and LGBT people. An unintended consequence of this is a “cycle of mutual neglect” where decision makers don’t get to hear from communities and thus don’t speak to them, and the communities whose voices aren’t heard get the message that their voices don’t count.

The DEC members represent constituencies whose perspectives have not historically been a part of policy discussions about aging. Direct outreach to the DEC and to these members will help make sure that participants to the White House Conference on Aging and related events represent as diverse a cross-section of the population as possible.

Additional factors to consider when working to maximize inclusion for diverse elders are:

Geography- The regional events leading up to the WHCOA are spread out across the continental United States (CONUS), but are in metropolitan areas that are sometimes not easily accessible to rural populations. The cities selected for the five regional events exclude HHS regions 6, 7, and 8, which contain a large proportion of Indian country. Additionally, locations outside CONUS include populations

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that are particularly hard to reach, including Alaska Natives, Native Hawaiian, and Pacific Islanders. Special consideration on how to ensure voices from these regions will be heard, either through special consideration for invitations and/or additional support needed to make sure people are able to travel to the cities where events will be held.

Data Collection and Disaggregation- Another means by which disenfranchised communities remain so is by lack of data. Insufficient data about communities creates its own self-fulfilling prophecy, where longitudinal data relies on traditional data sets that have excluded certain populations and discourages reconfiguring data samples to include new or different communities. Additionally, data collected in the aggregate often masks specific trends and disparities that can be present in sub-sections of larger communities. For example, things such as the “model minority myth” in the Asian American community are perpetuated by data in the aggregate that reports successful outcomes in total, but hides the realities of underresourced and underachieving refugee communities from Southeast Asia, as well as Native Hawaiian and Pacific Islander communities. Additionally, data collection for LGBT populations has historically been a challenge. The DEC strongly recommends using some of the best practices around data collection and disaggregation, including over-sampling vulnerable populations, and following some of the LGBT data collection strategies proposed by the Department of Health and Human Services <http://thetaskforceblog.org/2013/07/22/hhs-secretary-sebelius-announces-new-lgbt-data-collection/> and non-profit research organizations such as the Williams Institute.

Engagement

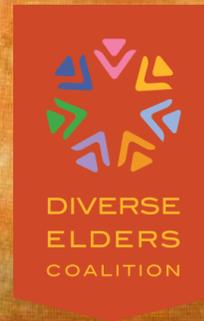
Getting to the table is half the equation. Ensuring that participants are best able to fully engage in the process and that their input is meaningfully received and heard is equally as important. Many of the populations DEC and its member organizations represent experience other challenges in accessing spaces where policy decisions are made and their perspectives are often misheard or misunderstood.

Making the White House Conference on Aging and its related events maximally accessible for the broadest range of participants is a critical way to ensure the best feedback from the most diverse range of perspectives. Some steps to move in that direction include:

Language- The communities that the DEC and its members serve include populations with the highest percentages of limited English proficiency (LEP). Adherence to policies such as the standards set in place by Executive Order 13166 around language access are a start.

Cultural Competence- All too often, the larger concept of cultural competence is only operationalized in the most basic ways, such as meeting needs of LEP individuals. Cultural competence requires more fundamental response to the particular needs and circumstances communities face. For example, transgender elders interested in participating may require events to mark and discuss gender in

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different ways. Guides such as the National Standards for Culturally and Linguistically Appropriate Services in Health Care and SAGE's training on cultural competence in the LGBT community will be helpful here.

Technology- Technology has been offered as a means to improve accessibility for events and as a way to maximize engagement. Unfortunately for too many of our communities, over-reliance on technology exacerbates the disparities communities have in accessing technology across the digital divide. The Pew Research Internet Project reports that African American and Hispanic populations trail their white counterparts in internet use. Language access is a strong indicator of internet use as well, so LEP communities are disproportionately likely to have limited access to technology. Coupling technology with other linguistic and culturally competent practices will help minimize the digital divide for events and activities.

Conclusion

"Inclusion" and "Engagement" are not destinations that one can reach by enacting any set of principles- they are values that require intentionality and at the same time, they are goals that can be moved towards in measurable ways through strategic use of resources. The DEC and its member groups know the difficulty in moving towards inclusiveness and fuller engagement and appreciate the steps taken thus far. We stand ready as partners in providing support and resources in providing expertise as the White House Conference on Aging seeks to bring together elders that better reflect America and all its diverse perspectives.