Multicultural Engagement and Inclusion Tips

CIT for Youth should engage and include representatives of the diverse cultures in your community. Including diverse perspectives in your community partnerships increases the cultural competence of your CIT for Youth program. Cultural competence integrates knowledge and information about individuals and groups into specific program approaches and techniques.

Cultural competency helps break down the barriers that impede communication and limit program and service effectiveness in diverse communities. For example, effective communication, both verbal and nonverbal, is key in CIT for Youth since law enforcement personnel must develop trust and rapport with youth experiencing psychiatric crises. To ensure your CIT for Youth program meets the needs of everyone in your community, the Steering Committee should consider the following steps:

- Recognize the broad dimensions of culture (including age, religion, social groups, ethnicity and race). Age is clearly important in CIT for Youth.
- Examine the demographics of your community. Identify the most prominent cultures and develop and integrate information and strategies on working effectively with diverse communities into the CIT for Youth training curriculum.
- Include leaders from the most prominent cultural communities in the decision-making process of your Steering Committee.
- Open a dialogue with community members of prominent cultural communities to better understand their views, strengths and needs. They will provide useful information, including:
    - Views on mental illness, accessing support and law enforcement.
    - Barriers to accessing mental health services and supports.
    - The meaning of gestures in their culture (*e.g.,* for some cultures, avoiding eye contact is a form of respect and not a sign that someone is lying).
- Respect families as a primary source for identifying needs and priorities in mental health services and supports and crisis intervention programs.
- Ensure that all of the community partners involved in the CIT for Youth program embrace and welcome diverse cultures.

For more information on engaging and including diverse cultures, check out NAMI's Multicultural Engagement and Inclusion Guide.