

UNIT IV

HIRING AND TRAINING PROFESSIONAL STAFF

Recruitment

A multi-faceted approach to recruitment should be used to locate, hire and train professional staff from communities of color. Ads, word of mouth, networking, and non-traditional means of recruitment are a few of the methods that may be employed to develop a pool of prospective candidates to diversify the staff of CASA programs.

Ads

To generate interest from candidates within communities of color it is important to advertise with community resources that traditionally serve these groups of people. An excellent place to advertise is in local community newspapers. Many communities of color circulate free publications that specifically address the needs and interests of the African American, Caribbean, and Latino communities. Mainstream publications such as daily newspapers and community papers should also be considered as possible sites for advertisements. Remember, when reporters from mainstream newspapers respond to invitations to attend events sponsored by CASA programs, frequently they go on to write feature articles about CASA which have both educational and outreach functions.

Consider placing advertisements in program bulletins of events sponsored by communities of color such as the Cotillion, Martin Luther King Day Programs, NAACP events, Black History Month events, church related events such as gospel festivals, choir anniversaries, Men's and Women's Day celebrations, as well as, cultural celebrations such as Puerto Rican, African American, Caribbean, or Multi-Cultural Festivals. Advertisements may also be placed on local radio channels that cater to communities of color, especially during musical programming that targets these communities, i.e., the gospel hour, jazz, R & B programming, and Spanish speaking or Latin music programming.

Word of Mouth

There are multiple ways to recruit new professional staff through word of mouth. For CASA programs located in multi-departmental agencies, efforts to stimulate interest in recruitment of candidates from communities of color can begin through informal discussions with fellow staff members. Meetings, staff presentations, lunch dates, and informal discussions around the water cooler can serve as good opportunities to pass along an interest in seeking new professional staff of color. In this way, existing staff, especially those persons with contacts in communities of color, can be the best place to generate word of mouth interest in new employees of color.

In contrast, free standing CASA programs may need to put forth greater initiative in their efforts to recruit new professional staff from communities of color. Unlike the former

CASA programs, these programs would do well to formalize their use of existing staff members to pass along the interest in recruiting from communities of color. For example, staff members can make phone calls to personal contacts in the human service community inquiring about qualified individuals with a record of service and commitment to the community. Follow-up phone calls, and/or face-to-face contacts may also be necessary if initial inquiries with personal contacts are less than favorable.

Networking

Networking is a more formal process of seeking new professional staff for CASA from communities of color. It requires professional staff to actively search for and solicit community agencies for opportunities to make formal presentations about the CASA program. The use of high quality print materials such as brochures, posters, and colorful folders that give specific and useful information about CASA, is an effective way to augment the presentations. Keep in mind, the careful selection of agencies should include agencies that traditionally serve communities of color such as, religious institutions, the NAACP, community centers, health clinics, professional organizations and service clubs. Remember, it is critically important to show respect for the leadership of these groups, therefore make initial contact utilizing the chain of command. Upon completion of the presentation, a follow-up phone call to the agency within the next few days may be useful. These phone contacts may help to determine if interest has been generated from among staff members, or if friends of staff members hearing about the presentations, have expressed an interest in CASA.

Finally, networking may also include mailing printed materials to businesses owned, operated, and/or that communities of color frequent such as beauty and barber shops, and/or suppliers, Realtors, clothing stores, construction & sales, caterers & restaurants, and funeral homes, etc. It would be wise to follow-up, make phone contact, or informally drop in on these business establishments to answer any questions that may arise from the disseminated printed materials.

Identifying Desirable Qualifications of Recruits

The effort to hire new professional staff from communities of color necessarily must begin with the identification of important qualities that prospective staff must possess. Credibility, committed involvement to community, advocacy for children, and the capacity to make effective presentations are among the most important qualities necessary for new prospective professional staff members. Moreover, it is important to demonstrate good faith regarding the serious commitment to diversifying the CASA staff. *Bare in mind, communities of color may highly scrutinize the methods used to recruit new staff and may challenge the recruitment of candidates that appear only to support tokenism.*

Credibility & Community Involvement

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Credibility in communities of color is generally given to individuals, groups, and/or organizations that, over time, have demonstrated an active involvement in causes that support the betterment of the community. Serving as a volunteer, an activist, or in a leadership capacity for a community-based organization like the NAACP, the community center, a social action committee, or a religious institution is a common way of developing credibility. It is also granted to persons who serve the community in a more informal way, for example, one who acts as a surrogate grandmother to neighborhood children, offers assistance such as a room to rent for a person trying to get back on their feet, or someone who looks in on the elderly during times of inclement weather. Credibility and community involvement go hand-in-hand; one is essential for, and assists with the cultivation and development of the other. Consequently, ideal candidates will be persons with both credibility and a generous history of commitment to serving communities of color.

Presentation Skills

New CASA professional staff must also have the capacity to give high quality presentations to agencies and institutions in the effort to recruit volunteers from communities of color. It is equally important to have the flexibility to deliver an informal presentation to a social club from the comfort of a club member's living room as it will be to give a more formal presentation before the congregation of a religious institution. The capacity to adjust the presentation to suit a variety of audience types will be a typical challenge and important skill of new professional staff.

Cultivating a Commitment to Diversity from Existing Staff

Prior to recruiting staff from communities of color, it may be necessary to raise the current staff's consciousness about the importance of diversity.

Boosting Morale for Diversity Prior to Recruiting

Efforts to boost morale for diversity recruitment can begin with a brief assessment of the impact to children and families of color when staff diversity is not a priority. Children and families of color routinely interface with institutions, such as schools and government agencies, where they face the scarcity of persons who look like themselves, or who come from their communities. When CASA programs, through staff selection, mirror the broader society's message that diversity is unimportant, children and families of color receive the subtle, yet powerful, impression that exclusion of people of color is okay. CASA programs must avoid replicating this negative pattern in that it contributes to suspicion and distrust of social service agencies by communities of color. To remain viable, CASA staff must lead the charge and have a strong commitment to diversity and have an astute appreciation for its significance to the efficacy of program goals.

Issue-Specific Diversity Training & Selection of Training Modules

To enhance staff's appreciation for diversity, a selection of topics for workshops and training modules must be compiled that have the potential to broaden the staff's knowledge and understanding of diversity. Training should be designed to help CASA staff have a complete picture of the lives and experiences of the clientele they serve. Training should also address an appreciation for the diversity challenges of staff and how to manage workplace diversity. Possible workshops and training modules might include a selection from the following:

- 1) diversity: group identity & individual differences;
- 2) diversity in the workplace: issue and challenges
- 3) the culture of poverty in a society that denies class distinctions;
- 4) racial and cultural differences in parenting styles;
- 5) poverty and parenting challenges;
- 6) race, class and the Department of Social Services;
- 7) race, class and the criminal justice system; and
- 8) single-parenthood: issues and concerns.

Recruitment From Existing Staff to Achieve Diversity

A logical first step in the diversification of new CASA professional staff is to recruit from among the existing staff members of the agency. For CASA programs connected to a multi-departmental agency, existing staff is close at hand and has a readily available record of credibility and committed involvement to communities of color. Existing staff may also have a keen awareness of the roadblocks and barriers the agency has faced in the achievement of CASA program goals due to the absence of a diversified staff.

Consequences of Not Having a Diverse Staff

CASA programs comprised of predominantly, or exclusively white staff that are unable to hire a person of color must carefully consider several challenges they face in their efforts to advance diversity.

Cost/Benefit

In the absence of new staff of color, white staff will need to develop social networks in communities of color, and must become aware of and involved in issues identified as significant to these communities. However, we must underscore the considerable time, energy and effort required to establish social networks, resources, contacts and influential people in communities of color. Establishing contacts, or networking, tends to be a slow, time consuming process that transpires along the course of a career, while assuming a series of employment positions, and during the process of personal and/or professional development. Furthermore, efforts to network as a white CASA staff member will require the additional challenge of developing trust and credibility within communities of color. Consequently, CASA programs should seriously consider and

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assess the cost/benefits of not hiring a person of color against the time intensive, and lengthy process for a white staff member to develop social networks in communities of color.

Undermines Credibility and Commitment to Diversity

Although white CASA staff may be willing to initiate steps to develop networks within communities of color, these initiatives may be perceived as superficial. The challenge for CASA programs will be their capacity to convince agencies and families that despite the limited, or virtual absence of people of color among the CASA staff, that they are committed to treating client families in a dignified and respectful manner. Perhaps an even greater challenge will be for CASA programs to communicate their commitment to diversity in the absence of a tangible first step, or “good faith” effort, – – the hiring of staff of color. As a result, it should not be underestimated the potential credibility that is lost with a diversity effort in which changing the complexion of the agency fails to receive the attention deemed necessary for the initiative.

Makes Recruitment of a Diverse Volunteer Base More Difficult

In the absence of staff of color, recruitment of volunteers of color is made more difficult. For example, select staff members, or administration, will need to cross the sociocultural lines that divide members of society and must be open to venturing into communities of color. CASA staff will then face the challenge of conveying the message that diversity is valued despite the obvious absence of new staff of color. Attempts to recruit volunteers of color while attending religious and cultural events, or political action meetings, will confront the typical reticence, suspicion and distrust expressed in questions regarding CASA’s commitment and credibility. How white CASA staff members respond to these questions will be critical to efforts to advance diversity initiatives.