

Community Choices

Public Policy Education Program

Module Three

Promoting Multicultural Awareness

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February 2000

SOUTHERN
RURAL
DEVELOPMENT
CENTER



Module Three Instructor's Guide

Promoting Multicultural Awareness

Objectives

After completing the workshop, participants will be able to do the following:

- ◆ Understand the definition of culture, racial group, stereotype and prejudice;
- ◆ Recognize how perceptions and stereotypes can influence participants in the public policy process;
- ◆ Recognize how values that vary across cultures might cause issues to be viewed differently by various segments of the community; and
- ◆ Become aware of the cultural dimensions of public policy issues.

Preparation

- ◆ Read all the materials in the module. Become familiar with the contents of the overview paper and the activities. Develop an outline of how you will present the information and involve participants in the workshop.
- ◆ Collect data for your state, county, or community on the breakdown of racial and ethnic groups. Use the overview paper as a guide to identify the types of information that you might obtain to illustrate past and present relations between these different groups of people. Focus on locality-specific information that will increase interest and involvement by participants.
- ◆ Make sure that the proper equipment (flip charts, for example) and materials are ready for the workshop.

Procedures and Time Line

- ◆ Introduce topic using Microsoft PowerPoint of the module's purpose and definitions (about 5 minutes).
- ◆ Conduct activity #1. The activity explores what groups live in the local community and how they came to live there.
- ◆ Introduce the terminology and discuss material from the module's overview. To avoid presenting a formal lecture on the topic, involve participants in the presentation as much as possible. Do all that you can to invite discussion and debate throughout the presentation of the overview.

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- ◆ Conduct activity #2. The activity asks participants to examine how racial and cultural differences in their community might affect human resources and local economic development. It then asks participants to examine a policy issue that can be influenced by different cultural understandings and then identify policy alternatives that would involve all local cultural groups.

Materials Needed:

- ◆ Copies of activity response sheets for each participant.
- ◆ A flip chart or blackboard and Microsoft PowerPoint.

Going Further— Things For Participants To Do:

- ◆ Conduct a more formal assessment of differing cultural groups by inviting influential and/or knowledgeable members of these groups to speak with program participants. They could discuss the history of the group in the community and the needs and desires of the group's members. Further, they could respond to questions posed by the participants.
- ◆ Conduct a more formal assessment of differing cultural groups by having participants talk with the leadership (religious, political, economic) of these groups and discuss their findings with the other program participants.
- ◆ Determine the cultural breakdown of the program's participants and invite members of groups that may be absent to participate in the remainder of the program in order to include as many points of view as possible.
- ◆ Identify multicultural education programs in your community or locality and ask the instructor to loan materials to the group or to conduct a presentation in order to facilitate participants' understanding of the objectives of this type of educational program.

Cultural Diversity and Public Policy

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Preface

The first section of this program is designed to lay the foundation for doing public policy education work so participants can gradually examine various aspects of the human resources and economic development relationship in their communities. The first module introduced a useful model that can be applied to the analysis of issues of local importance. The second module offered a brief review of how local decisions are made. Module 3 ends the first section by examining the relationship between a community's cultural diversity and its public policy decisions. The intent is to sensitize program participants to the fact that local policy decisions must give attention to the variety of values and perspectives that exist along cultural lines.

Introduction

The United States is one of the most culturally diverse nations in the world and is becoming increasingly more so. The numbers and relative percentages of the population for African-Americans, Hispanics, and Asian-Americans are increasing. It is estimated that by the year 2050, the United States will be comprised of 52.5 percent whites, 22.5 percent Hispanics 14.4 percent African-Americans, and 9.7 percent Asians. How can such a variety of people learn to live in harmony with each other, let alone work together for the common good? Although this is a difficult question to answer, it seems clear that the future economic productivity of all Americans will depend not just on the talents and training of white children, but also on those of African-American, Hispanic, Asian, and American-Indian children.

This Community Choices module is designed to help participants:

- ◆ Become more aware of their own prejudices and use of stereotypes;
- ◆ Discuss how cultural differences and similarities might play a part in public policy decisions; and
- ◆ Gain insight into how those who wish to affect public policy

We begin by defining key concepts that will be used throughout the module. Next, we set the context for a brief discussion of the economic and educational realities of whites, African-Americans, and Hispanics by illustrating how these groups came to live where they currently reside. Finally, we discuss multicultural education as a means of better informing the

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public policy decision-making process. In doing so, we hope to continue the process of strengthening participants' understanding of the complex set of policy issues associated with their community's human capital resources and economic development options.

A Starting Point: Defining the Terms

Perceived racial and cultural differences can promote ethnocentrism, prejudice, and stereotyping, all of which create intolerance that affects the outcome of public policy decisions. This lack of intolerance for others can grow to the point where it negatively affects the ability of groups of people to adequately develop human capital—which can have devastating effects on the community's ability to grow and develop economically. Before examining this relationship further, let's define the terms we will be using.

“Cultural differences between groups are usually at the heart of racial and ethnic relations and conflict.”

Most social scientists maintain that there is no distinctive biological reality called “race” that can be determined by objective scientific procedures. In fact, they argue that we must view race not as a given biological reality but as a socially constructed reality. A “**racial group**” can be defined, therefore, as a social group that people inside or outside the group have decided is important to single out as inferior or superior, typically on the basis of subjectively selected real or alleged physical characteristics. It is important to note that, with time, racial group definitions can change and even disappear.

An “**ethnic group**,” on the other hand, can be defined as a group socially distinguished or set apart, by others or by itself, primarily on the basis of cultural or national-origin characteristics. Groups such as Irish- and Italian-Americans usually develop a strong sense of a common cultural heritage and ancestry.

Cultural differences between groups are usually at the heart of racial and ethnic relations and conflict. “**Culture**” has been defined as the shared values, understandings, symbols, and practices of a group of people. The shared symbols are the means by which people “communicate, perpetuate, and develop their knowledge about and attitudes toward life.” Culture becomes a process by which groups adapt to each other. Groups can give up their cultural heritage almost entirely and adapt to another culture or, in the face of violence and oppression, cultures can transform to become a symbol of resistance by fostering a sense of pride and identity.

The separation of groups that foster a lack of understanding can be based in “**ethnocentrism**,” the view of things in which one's own group is the center of everything. It is characterized by a loyalty to the values, beliefs, and members of their own group and the prompting, often times, of negative views of other groups. These negative views are manifested in prejudices and stereotypes that influence the social, economic, and political interaction among groups.

“Prejudice” has evolved from meaning a judgment made prior to experience (“hasty judgment”) to the present connotation of unfavorable bias based on an unsupported judgement. It may be felt or expressed. It may be directed toward a group as a whole, or toward an individual because he or she is a member of that group.

In printing, a stereotype is a metal plate that reproduces the same picture over and over. In thinking, a **“stereotype”** is a mental picture that overgeneralizes racial or ethnic group practices and behavior. It makes all people in a particular group look and act the same way. Stereotypes can cloud our judgement because they ignore the fact that no two human beings are identical. Stereotypes distort the truth. They suggest that all people in a particular group behave in the same way. They also suggest that only these people behave that way. Neither is true.

The root of many of these negative attitudes is fear based on ignorance about others and a lack of understanding about how much they are like us. There is a perceived risk involved in interacting with people from other cultures based on this lack of understanding. Overcoming this perceived risk and learning to understand others is essential if communities are to meet future challenges and develop socially and economically. We begin by examining how groups came to live where they are currently.

Background

The geographic concentrations of rural African-Americans and Hispanics have important implications for understanding the problems they face today and their prospects for the future. The geographic concentration of rural African-Americans in the South and rural Hispanics in the Southwest is no accident, but rather the result of historical patterns of economic development. For generations, rural African-Americans in the South worked in the region’s cotton fields as tenant farmers, as sharecroppers, or as agricultural laborers. When economic production was mechanized in the 1950s and 1960s, the main source of economic livelihood for millions of African-Americans disappeared.

On the other hand, rural Hispanics in the Southwest have come in waves from Mexico, especially after the Mexican Civil War in 1910. Often the only employment open to them was as agricultural workers. Like rural African-Americans, many rural Hispanics were able to eventually leave agricultural work and move to urban centers in the North. However, a residual of low-skilled, poorly educated Hispanics has remained in the rural Southwest.

Nearly 91 percent of all rural African-Americans reside in the South and more than half are found in the South Atlantic states. There are 276 counties in the South in which African-Americans account for 30 percent or more of the total population. Over 2.5 million of the five million rural Afri-

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can-Americans live in these 276 counties [3]. Nearly half of all rural Hispanics live in the West and Mountain regions. The bulk of these are found in the Mountain states of Arizona, New Mexico, and Colorado. Another 40 percent of the rural Hispanic population reside in the South, mainly Texas.

This module suggests that racially and ethnically linked economic inequalities in rural areas are, in part, because of the inability of African-Americans and Hispanics to secure good-paying jobs in the local economy because of a lack of understanding and tolerance for members of these groups. Though the roots of these differences are historically based, an examination of current conditions show little improvement, particularly in rural communities.

Current Conditions

“Together, manufacturing and service industries account for over 85 percent of all jobs held by African-American women.”

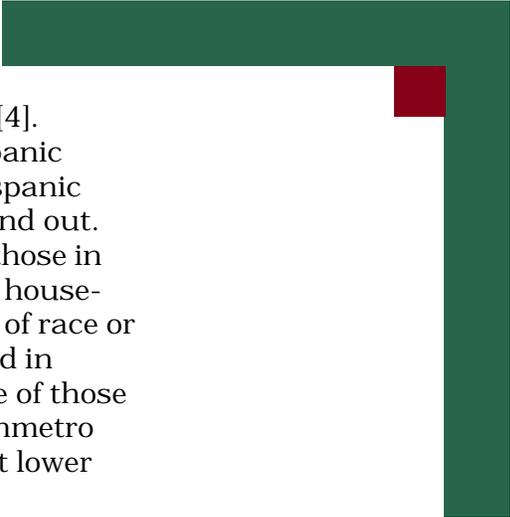
EMPLOYMENT OPPORTUNITIES

It is evident from information available that race and ethnicity are powerful determinants of job placement in rural areas. Looking at the makeup of the rural workforce, it is apparent that minority ethnic group members face more restricted occupational alternatives than do whites. Over 40 percent of rural African-Americans hold manufacturing jobs. Together, manufacturing and service industries account for over 85 percent of all jobs held by African-American women. Hispanic men and women alike are over represented in agriculture. In contrast, rural white men occupy the more favorable positions in the occupational structure. Nearly half hold professional, managerial, technical or skilled blue-collar jobs. Areas of the rural South with high concentrations of African-Americans remain saddled with an economic base dominated almost entirely by slow-growing, stagnating, or declining industries. Consequently, most occupational opportunities in the Black Belt are at the low-wage, low-skilled end of the job ladder. This means that many are subjected to low standards of living with their attendant implications for limited mobility and social acceptance [3].

INCOME

There are a number of important facts about the economic situation facing minorities in rural America today. First, African-American and Hispanic workers in rural areas earn less than their urban counterparts. Second, the income gap between rural workers and urban workers persist. Third, within rural areas, African-Americans and Hispanics are at the bottom of the economic ladder. Fourth, areas with large concentrations of African-Americans and Hispanics rank well below other nonmetropolitan counties on the income ladder [3].

One arena in which differences in economic well-being can be demonstrated by race and ethnicity is median household income (that level of income in which 50 percent of the households fall below and 50 percent place above the figure). In 1998, for example, rural African-American households had median incomes that were 63 percent that of white rural households. Hispanics fared better, garnering median household incomes



that were about 25 percent below that of rural white households [4]. Recent 1998 figures indicate that both African-American and Hispanic households are about three times more likely than white, non-Hispanic households to be living below the poverty line [5]. Two points stand out. First, African-Americans and Hispanics households, particularly those in rural areas, remain disproportionately concentrated in the lowest household income categories. Second, all rural households, regardless of race or ethnic background, continue to lag behind the income levels found in metro areas. In 1998, for example, the median household income of those in metro areas of the United States stood at \$40,983, while in nonmetro areas, median household incomes reached \$32,022, or 22 percent lower [4].

EDUCATIONAL ATTAINMENT

Though data show that the number of rural African-Americans and Hispanics with an eighth grade education or less has decreased substantially during the 1980s and 1990s, not only are there proportionately fewer rural whites with eight years of schooling or less, but there also are substantially more whites with college degrees. Historical inequalities seem bound to continue, in part, because one consequence of living in an economically depressed area is that local funds for schooling are more limited. Therefore, it is important to note that the socioeconomic climate of rural areas can have a detrimental effect on educational performance. Low income rural areas are unlikely to produce the level of human capital necessary to attract good jobs to the area. Conversely, the lack of desirable employment alternatives in poor areas forces the better educated African-Americans and Hispanics in these places to migrate to urban areas where their skills and abilities can be better compensated [3].

Programs/Policies

In the best of all worlds, the disadvantaged positions of rural African-Americans and Hispanics would become an issue of national concern and a federally directed and supported initiative would be launched to alleviate the inequalities that currently exist. However, times have changed since President Johnson declared his War on Poverty in the 1960s and the political mood has turned away from large-scale, federally sponsored programs to a belief that poverty and economic development are issues that are most appropriately addressed at the local level [3].

Addressing these important issues at the local level could be problematic, however, because perceiving members of other cultural groups based on a lack of information and understanding could interfere with the process of making or influencing public policy. Public policy education is based on a philosophical concept about the value of public participation in governmental decisions. It is assumed that if the democratic process is to function effectively, the citizenry must be well informed of the major issues of the day and everyone must have the opportunity to participate in the policymaking process.

“Citizens of all cultural backgrounds are important stakeholders and their input should be valued in every part of the process. Therefore, we introduce and promote the idea of multicultural education as a means of overcoming prejudice and fostering real, democratic policy decision-making processes.”



The outcome of public policy will be better if the key stakeholders help define the issues, frame the problem, and help determine ways to address the problems. Citizens of all cultural backgrounds are important stakeholders and their input should be valued in every part of the process. Therefore, we introduce and promote the idea of multicultural education as a means of overcoming prejudice and fostering real, democratic policy decision-making processes.

Multicultural Education

Multiculturalism usually represents policies that take into consideration differences among groups that formerly were excluded from the mainstream of American society. Multicultural innovations, including educational programs, provide one way of dealing with the persistence of a dominant Anglo culture in an increasingly diverse society. The accent on the dominant Anglo culture tends to teach members of other racial and cultural groups that their own cultures are inferior and undesirable [2]. It also inhibits members of the dominant culture from grasping the complexity of values and beliefs in an ever changing world.

Historically, every non-English group that entered this society was pressured or forced to give up its cultural practices and adapt to the dominant culture. We argue that in order for rural communities to advance, they must engage in clear discussions of the ways people of divergent cultural backgrounds develop and maintain their own social and cultural knowledge. Further, every racial and/or cultural group should be allowed to coexist with every other group and that there should be strong mutual respect for divergent cultural ways. We feel that this is a necessary position to take if groups of people are able to develop their human capital resources and apply them to the overall economic development of the community. If one group is held back and not allowed to participate, every group in the community will ultimately suffer the adverse consequences.

Multicultural education grew out of a civil rights movement grounded in such ideals of the West as freedom, justice, and equality. It generally promotes an understanding of both positive and negative features of American racial and cultural relations. Its goal is that students of all colors and cultures be given the knowledge, skills, and attitudes needed to function effectively in a culturally and ethnically diverse state, nation, and world.

Multicultural education is in the best American tradition of liberty and justice and can make available to our society a largely untapped reservoir of human talents and resources. This is more important today than ever. Businesses in America trade with countries that encompass many different racial groups and nationalities. The prosperity of America, therefore, depends on the willingness and ability to understand and get along with diverse groups of people. A lack of knowledge about other people, cultures, and languages cripples many Americans who go abroad to conduct business or deal politically with people in other nations.

If multicultural education programs are well implemented, they represent a way to bring diverse people together in mutual respect for one another and for the equal rights and privileges promised by the Declaration

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of Independence.

Conclusion

It is important that fear be set aside. Racial and cultural prejudices often come from ignorance about others and creates fear. Diverse groups of people can overcome that fear by focusing on those issues and values that they share.

A necessary ingredient is tolerance on the part of all participants. This, too, is easier said than accomplished. An attitude that is fair and objective toward those who have opinions, attitudes, values and practices different than one's own, while hard to achieve, is a worthy goal.

Becoming involved as citizens attempting to influence public policy can help us overcome some of the lack of understanding people have of diverse cultures. As was stated earlier, diverse groups of people can overcome their concentration on how they are different by focusing on those issues and values that they share in common and working together toward common goals. Upon achieving those goals, the fear of the unknown is replaced by a shared sense of accomplishment. Such an experience can aid in the acceptance that cultural diversity enriches a community, rather than detracts from it [3].

In conclusion, this module has attempted to promote multicultural awareness by first defining terms which are important to better understanding our feelings towards others. Next, historical and current conditions of the two largest minority cultural groups, African-Americans and Hispanics, were discussed to enhance our appreciation of how a lack of cultural awareness can lead to adverse consequences for members of those groups, and for the community's development goals as well.

Finally, multicultural education was introduced as an important part of public policy decision-making processes. An awareness of others who are "different" and their inclusion in decision-making activities improves their human capital resources and adds talent and creativity to the process of determining the community's economic future. This is especially important in today's uncertain and rapidly changing world.

References

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- [4] U.S. Census Bureau. 1999. *Current Population Reports P60-206: Money Income in the United States, 1998*. Washington, DC: U.S. Government Printing Office.
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Module Three Instructor's Guide

Promoting Multicultural Awareness

Small Group Activities



Identifying Your Community's Cultural Diversity

Activity #1

Time: 25 to 30 minutes

Materials Needed

- ◆ Flip chart
- ◆ Markers
- ◆ Masking tape

Purpose

- ◆ To introduce the idea of culture's connection to local human resources and economic development by exploring your local community's cultural diversity and history.

Procedures

- ◆ Introduce the activity. If the group is too large, break up into smaller groups of 4 to 5 people as warranted.
- ◆ Have each group address the questions below and record their answers on a flip chart for later discussion.
- ◆ After the task has been completed, have each group tape their sheet of paper on the wall for comparison and discussion. One member from each group should present their findings.

Introduction (Sample Script)

To understand how culture relates to the human resource base in our community, think about what groups live here, how long they have been here and what has been their contribution to the community's development. Let's take a few minutes to talk about who lives here, why and what difference they've made. Be sure to discuss and differentiate between all cultural groups that live here.

Discussion

- Q. How many different cultural groups live in your community? List them and discuss what percentages of the population they make up.
- Q. When and how did they come to be a part of the community? Discuss when they moved to the community and under what circumstances.
- Q. What do you consider their descriptive characteristics to be? List those characteristics which make them different (language, occupations, etc.) and list those characteristics by which they are similar to the other groups (reli-



gion, political affiliation, etc.).

- Q. What do you consider to be their contributions to the community?
- Q. What do you consider to be unique conditions and/or problems they face?

Activity #2

Discussion (Part 1)

- Q. What is the condition of the human resources of these different groups? Discuss the differences in human capital between the groups (education, income, family structure, etc.).
- Q. How do you compare these groups with regard to changes in their human capital resources over time? Discuss how these factors have changed (for good or bad) since the group arrived in the community.
- Q. What is the ultimate effect of these differences in human capital resources on the community's economic development? Discuss whether changes in human capital need to take place within each group before the community can achieve its economic development goals.

Discussion (Part 2)

- Q. In what ways do cultural differences affect public policy decisions in the community? Among the general categories that are important to have on the list are:
 - a. When people of different cultures could unite to address common public concerns.
 - b. When people seeking a change in public policy are of a different cultural background from the decision-makers.
 - c. When cultural differences are central to the change sought or when policies are, or appear to be, applied differently across cultural sub-groups.
 - d. When racial or cultural understanding is the public policy issue.
- Q. After a discussion of what impact cultural differences can have on these areas of public policy, look at a particular public policy instance in which there is a cultural difference element and analyze it. What needs to be done in order to assure that all cultural groups involved will benefit fairly from the decision?