Introduction

Cultural exchange activities help community members (e.g., community partners and sponsors) learn about key aspects of a newcomer’s culture. They also create opportunities for receiving communities to welcome and celebrate newcomers and consider concepts of inclusion, cultural humility, and bias, as defined on this page.

Inclusion

Inclusion refers to the active, deliberate, and ongoing effort to ensure that the diversity among a group of people, ideas, and experiences are welcome, included, and celebrated. Creating inclusive communities is about belonging and making people feel welcome.

Cultural Humility

Our identities shape our worldviews and the ways we communicate with others. Cultural humility is a lifelong process focusing on self-reflection and personal critique, including acknowledging one’s biases. Practicing cultural humility will help community members build trust with newcomers.

Bias

Bias is an inclination or preference for or against an individual or group that interferes with judgment. There are different types of bias, including implicit or unconscious bias. Each person has biases, and identifying them is an essential first step in understanding how they may influence how we interact with and treat others.
Getting Started

STEP 1
To make newcomers feel welcome, included, and celebrated, explore concepts of inclusion, cultural humility, and bias. Complete the self-reflection activities to better understand or discuss these concepts with other community members.

To explore concepts of identity and inclusion, register for CORE’s Learning Platform and complete the course: Navigating Identity and Inclusion in Refugee Resettlement.

STEP 2
Once you reflect on concepts of inclusion, cultural humility, and bias, engage with newcomers to learn more about their culture. When preparing for these conversations, ensure you create a safe learning environment by incorporating CORE’s learning methodologies, such as student-centered learning and taking a strengths-based approach.

To explore concepts of cultivating safe learning environments, register for CORE’s Learning Platform and complete the course: Creating a Positive Learning Environment.

Facilitation Tips

Conducting cultural exchange and self-reflection activities can lead to challenging conversations that can make people feel uncomfortable or agitated. If this happens, try the following:

- Be patient with yourself and others as you identify potential biases you might have. We tend to gravitate towards those similar to us, which can lead to bias against those perceived as different.
- Keep an open mind, especially when others share beliefs you do not hold or perceive as wrong. This is an excellent opportunity to learn more about newcomers by asking open-ended questions such as: What makes you think that way?
- If you feel uncomfortable, pause and consider what made you or others uncomfortable. Then, take a five-minute break to give yourself and others space to acknowledge discomfort.
- Remember to create a safe space for everyone to share and connect and that differences in experiences and beliefs should be respected.
Self-Reflection Activities

The following self-reflection activities explore concepts of inclusion, cultural humility, and bias. Use these activities to reflect on your understanding of these concepts and how they connect to your work with newcomers. Individually or with other community members, complete these three self-reflection activities before facilitating cultural exchange activities with newcomers:

- Discussing Inclusion
- Discussing Cultural Humility
- Discussing Bias

Self-reflection is a continuous process that starts with looking introspectively and, when possible, sharing your knowledge and awareness with other community members. Use these activities as a starting point to reflect on your beliefs and experiences. The self-reflection process should continue after completing these activities, as these exercises will help you identify growth areas to be more inclusive and welcoming to newcomers.

Each activity includes additional guidance and next steps. The additional guidance provides strategies to explore these concepts in more depth. The next steps provide guidance on applying these concepts in your interactions with newcomers.
Step 1
Review the definition of inclusion:
Inclusion refers to the active, deliberate, and ongoing effort to ensure that the diversity among a group of people, ideas, and experiences are welcome, included, and celebrated. Creating inclusive communities is about belonging and making people feel welcome.

Step 2
Independently, consider the following question: What similarities and differences do you have to other members in your community or sponsor group?

Step 3
If working with others, share the similarities and differences you came up with. You may discover that there are more similarities than differences amongst your group. As a group, consider why that is and how your personal identities may impact the way you interact with newcomers.

Step 4
As a group, take turns sharing a time when you felt unwelcome. What were the circumstances? How did you feel?

Next Steps
When people feel included, they feel safe and secure. You have a role in contributing to an inclusive community.

Brainstorm ways you can make newcomers feel welcome, included, and celebrated. For example, celebrating holidays together and sharing food.

Additional Guidance
There are layers to our identities. Our identities include both personal and social traits.

- Personal identity refers to characteristics you would give yourself. These can include traits, behaviors, beliefs, values, and other characteristics that make you who you are.

- Social identity refers to characteristics that determine who you are in terms of the groups to which you belong. These identity markers are usually defined by some physical or social characteristics. Examples of social identities can include race/ethnicity, gender, social class/socioeconomic status, (dis)abilities, religious beliefs, and other similar characteristics.

When people describe you, they may choose labels based on your outward appearance. You may find those labels offensive. Remember to maintain a safe space. Calmly explain why you found the word offensive and what word you prefer instead. For example, you may label a newcomer by their immigration status (e.g., refugee). However, newcomers may reject the label refugee, which can be characterized by helplessness, uncertainty, and dependency.
Step 1
Review the definition of cultural humility:
Our identities shape our worldviews and the ways we communicate with others. Cultural humility is a lifelong process focusing on self-reflection and personal critique, including acknowledging one’s own biases. Practicing cultural humility will help community members build trust with newcomers.

Step 2
Individually, consider the following:
What is one aspect of my culture or community that I admire? (e.g., communication styles, family values, cultural norms). Write down reasons you are proud of that aspect.

Step 3
Now, consider the following:
What is one aspect of my culture or community that I do not like as much? Write down reasons you do not like that aspect.

Step 4
If working with others, share what you have written. Once everyone has shared, discuss similarities and differences.

Step 5
Read the following scenario aloud: The newcomer you are working with tells you they are married to their cousin. While it is socially unacceptable to marry a family member in the United States, it is not against the law in your state.

Step 6
Consider the following: How would you feel about learning this? What is an appropriate reaction to this information?

Additional Guidance
You might feel uncomfortable with what was presented in the scenario. You may think that this is not an acceptable practice in the U.S. and that newcomers should stop this practice because it contradicts American norms. Remember that our worldview subjectively shapes our concepts of right and wrong, and what is considered acceptable in one culture might be taboo in another. Remembering this when interacting with newcomers will help us be more inclusive and welcoming of those with different beliefs and values.
Discussing Cultural Humility Continued

Next Steps
It is important to avoid responding in a culturally-insensitive way to new ideas and practices. Brainstorm appropriate responses in situations when your own beliefs and norms are challenged. For example:

- Pause to consider your reaction before you respond in a culturally-insensitive way.
- Avoid non-verbal signs of disagreement or using language that might be alienating to others, such as: “You are in the U.S. now. You need to stop that.”
- If the practice is illegal, inform the newcomer of their rights and responsibilities in the U.S. including the consequences of breaking the law.

Discussing Bias

Step 1
Review the definition of bias:
Bias is an inclination or preference for or against an individual or group that interferes with judgment. There are different types of bias, including implicit or unconscious bias. Each person has biases, and identifying them is an essential first step in understanding how they may influence how we interact with and treat others.

Step 2
Independently, think about a time when you were looking for a new doctor. How important was it for you that they were from the same group as you (e.g., race, ethnicity, nationality, age)? Why did you choose them? Would you go to a doctor with credentials from a foreign country? Why or why not?

Step 3
If working with others, share your experiences. Discuss how bias can manifest in different aspects of our lives. Even choosing a healthcare provider can be affected by stereotypes. It is also natural for people to visit doctors who speak their language and share a similar cultural background, but this shouldn’t be the sole reason for choosing to see a doctor.

Step 4
As a group, consider what you know about the newcomers you are serving. If you have yet to be paired with a family, consider what you know about refugee populations resettling to the United States. For example: What have you heard on television or read online about the newcomer’s culture? What do you think their cultural norms are (e.g., language, religion, gender roles)? Do you have anxieties or worries about what impact these cultural norms may have on your community?
Next Steps
Lack of exposure and experience with a newcomer’s culture may cause anxieties or bias against them. While newcomers will adopt certain aspects of American culture, they will also keep some aspects of their culture. Change is unavoidable for both newcomers and the receiving community. Consider ways you can learn more about newcomers and help them celebrate important aspects of their culture. For example, learn about how their clothing choices reflect their culture.

Additional Guidance
It may be difficult to identify and share your biases. Identifying any biases you may have can help you not act upon them. For example, if you hear someone speaking another language, you may assume they do not speak English. Acknowledging this bias will help you to not act on your assumptions and make the individual feel unwelcome. Use the following questions to identify any potential bias you may have:

- Do I have enough information about newcomers and their cultures to have an informed opinion?
- Do I hold a positive or negative stereotype about a certain culture?

Once you identify your bias, brainstorm ways how you can avoid having your bias impact your interactions with newcomers.
Cultural Exchange Activities

The following is a list of five cultural exchange activities that you can integrate into early resettlement services. Instructions for each activity are provided on the pages that follow.

1. **Discuss personal identities**

2. **Discover the connection between food, culture, and identity**

3. **Explore unfamiliar holidays and celebrations**

4. **Reflect on cultural expressions and the meaning of individualism**

5. **Uncover how what we choose to wear reflects our culture**
As a community member striving to create an inclusive community, you can incorporate opportunities for cultural exchange into many interactions with newcomers. Reference these activities while working through the Cultural Orientation toolkit for community partners and sponsors. When facilitating cultural exchange activities, apply the tips for effective service delivery shared in that toolkit, including being trauma-informed, culturally sensitive, taking a strengths-based approach, and providing gender-equitable services.

Interpreters play an essential role in Cultural Orientation. When working with newcomers with limited English, facilitate these activities alongside an interpreter. Some activities call for writing. If newcomers are pre-literate, ask them to draw images instead.

Choose which activities from this guide to incorporate into your exchanges with newcomers. When choosing activities, consider whether the newcomer will be comfortable sharing their personal experiences with you. Always remind newcomers that they can choose what they are comfortable sharing. If you hear or observe that the newcomer is hesitant to share their personal experiences, focus on the activities that explore arts and culture, such as Discover the Connection between Food, Culture, and Identity or Uncover how what we Choose to Wear Reflects our Cultural Identity.

There is a self-reflection activity at the end of each cultural exchange activity. Do not complete the self-reflection activities with newcomers. Instead, either individually or with other community members, use the self-reflection activities to continue the dialogue about creating an inclusive community.
Discuss Personal Identities

This cultural exchange activity is ideal for community members to understand how the way they identify newcomers may differ from how newcomers identify themselves.

Instructions

STEP 1
Share with newcomers: Today, I want to hear more about you. You can choose what you want to share and you can let me know if you do not want to share certain information. You may also ask me questions to learn more about me.

STEP 2
Ask newcomers: Can you think of three words you would use to describe me to your friend who has not met me? I will also think of three words that I would use to describe you to a friend of mine who has not met you. We will share our words later. You can write them down or draw pictures to help you remember them.

Key Messages:
- If newcomers are having difficulty coming up with words, share the following prompts:
  - What do you know about me?
  - What do you know about my family?

STEP 3
Ask newcomers: Now, what three words would you use to describe yourself when you first meet my friend? I will also think of three words that I would use to describe myself when I first meet your friend.

STEP 4
Ask newcomers: Now, can you share the three words you chose to describe me?

STEP 5
Share with newcomers the three words you chose to describe yourself to their friend. Note any similarities or differences in the words that you both chose.

STEP 6
Share with newcomers whether the words they chose to describe you are words that you would choose to describe yourself. If they chose words that you would not choose to describe yourself, explain why.
STEP 7
Ask newcomers: Now, can you share the three words you chose to describe yourself?

STEP 8
Share with newcomers the three words you chose to describe them. Note any similarities or differences in the words that you both chose.

STEP 9
Ask newcomers: Would you have chosen different words to describe yourself if you were not introducing yourself to a stranger? For example, are there different words you want to share to tell me more about yourself today?

Self-Reflection Activity
After facilitating this activity, consider why you and the newcomer may have chosen the words you did to describe each other. Were the words rooted in each other's appearance or stereotypes about each other's cultures? If they were, were you able to engage in an effective conversation to address those stereotypes? If you were not able to engage in an effective conversation, how may you address it in a future conversation?
Discover the Connection Between Food, Culture, and Identity

Instructions

STEP 1
Ask newcomers: What are five foods you always have in your kitchen?

STEP 2
Share with newcomers five foods you always have stocked in your kitchen. Explain what you cook with those foods and how you learned to make that recipe.

STEP 3
Ask newcomers: What is a typical recipe you cook with the foods you named, and how did you learn that recipe?

STEP 4
Explain to newcomers: Food can be closely connected to our cultural identity. People from different backgrounds eat different foods. Our family recipes can help us remember people we love and celebrate our culture, including special occasions.

STEP 5
Share with newcomers the story behind the recipe you shared.

STEP 6
Ask newcomers: Is there a specific recipe that you make for special occasions? What is the recipe? What is the occasion?

STEP 7
Ask newcomers: Have you been able to find the ingredients you need for that recipe here?

STEP 8
If the newcomer has not found the ingredients they need, help the newcomer identify ethnic grocers or online resources where they can find the ingredients they need.
Discover the Connection Between Food, Culture, and Identity

Instructions Continued

**STEP 9**
Explain to newcomers: A cookbook is a collection of recipes that guides someone in preparing and making new foods. Cookbooks have instructions and photos that explain each step. Have you ever written down your recipe? Would you like to teach me how to make this recipe, and I can help you document it to pass it along to your family and friends in the future?

**Self-Reflection Activity**
Did the newcomer share any food preferences or restrictions that stood out? Based on what you learned, consider how a newcomer starting school may feel eating at the cafeteria. If they bring their own food, how may they feel eating their lunch around their peers who are eating something different? How can you support the student to feel welcome, included, and celebrated?
Explore Unfamiliar Holidays and Celebrations

This activity explores holidays and celebrations in the United States and around the world. It also encourages us to consider how our lack of exposure and experience can create judgment about unfamiliar holidays and celebrations.

If you are interested in talking about secular or cultural holidays with newcomers, follow track A. If you are interested in talking about religious holidays with newcomers, follow track B.

Instructions

STEP 1
Ask newcomers: What U.S. holidays have you heard of? What do you know about the holidays?

STEP 2
If you celebrate the holiday, share with newcomers whether their understanding depicts your personal experience.

Key Messages:
There are ten national holidays in the United States and even more holidays celebrated by different religious and cultural groups. Some national holidays include Independence Day celebrated in July, Thanksgiving celebrated in November, and Christmas celebrated in December. Christmas is also a religious holiday.

STEP 3
Ask newcomers:

- Track A: What cultural holidays do you celebrate? Which is your favorite?
- Track B: What religious holidays do you celebrate? Which is your favorite?

STEP 4
Share with newcomers what you know about the holiday or celebration. Consider using the phrasing, “When I imagine [holiday or celebration], I think of [____].” Ask if your understanding is accurate.
STEP 5
Ask newcomers:

- **Track A**: How do you celebrate the holiday? Is there specific music you sing or listen to? Are there special foods you eat?
- **Track B**: How do you celebrate the holiday? Is there a special service at your place of worship?

STEP 6
Share with newcomers your favorite religious or cultural celebration:

- **Track A**: Some cultural celebrations include but are not limited to: quinceanera, local festivals, pride month, and Black History Month.
- **Track B**: Some religious celebrations include but are not limited to: bar or bat mitzvah, baptism, communion, Diwali, and Eid al-Fitr.

STEP 7
Ask newcomers: When you imagine the holiday or celebration, what do you think of? Share whether their understanding is accurate.

**Key Messages:**
Sometimes what we hear on the news or from friends and family impacts how we think about unfamiliar cultures. This may include judgement about religious or cultural celebrations that we do not celebrate ourselves. When we develop judgment against aspects of someone’s culture, that is called bias. It is possible to have a bias because something is new or we have not had exposure to it.

STEP 8
Share with newcomers something new you learned. Ask the newcomer to share something new they learned. Then, brainstorm ways to help each other continue learning about and observing holidays and celebrations that are important to you both in the future.
Explore Unfamiliar Holidays and Celebrations

Instructions Continued

**Self-Reflection Activity**
Does your community currently hold any events that celebrate the holiday the newcomer shared? If not, are there ways you can make the newcomer’s traditions feel welcome, included, and celebrated in your community? Start by considering how can you educate other community members about celebrations important to newcomers.
This activity explores the meaning of individualism in the United States and how it compares to other cultures. It also enforces the message that it is okay to be different and hold different values as a newcomer.

**Instructions**

**STEP 1**
Share with newcomers: A cultural expression is a traditional and cultural saying that expresses a shared experience. One American expression is, be your own person. This expression is commonly used to describe the American value of individualism.

**STEP 2**
Ask newcomers: What does individualism mean?

**Key Messages:**
Individualism means that each individual is their own person, not a representative of their family, community or any other group. This value allows people to pursue lives that fulfill their wants and needs without being constrained by social norms and expectations.

**STEP 3**
Share with newcomers: Some cultural expressions do not translate into different languages or cultures. That’s why expressions can tell us a lot about the cultures they come from.

**STEP 4**
Ask newcomers: Was it easy to understand the cultural expression that I shared? Is this value the same or different in your culture? Do you agree with the value of individualism? Share your reasons.
STEP 5
Ask newcomers: Can you share a cultural expression from your country of origin (or protection) that you would like to keep practicing in your new country? What does it mean?

Key Messages:
Sometimes when we come to another country, we think that we should abandon our values to integrate. It is important to remember that it’s okay to keep your values while learning about the values of your new country. You are not required to disregard all your values to integrate into American society. In fact, this diversity is what makes this country great.

Self-Reflection Activity
Were you surprised at the value(s) the newcomers shared? Do you have any bias against the newcomers keeping this value? If so, what makes you biased against it? How would you address this bias? Similarly, how would you react if the newcomer shares bias against the value of individualism? What would you say? Remember that values are deeply rooted in culture, and what is accepted in one culture might be frowned upon in another.
Uncover how what we Choose to Wear Reflects our Cultural Identity

This activity is ideal for learning about multicultural celebrations and the attire worn to mark the occasion. It also explores how clothing can reflect a newcomer’s cultural identity and how that identity may or may not change during their resettlement.

Instructions

STEP 1
Explain to newcomers: What we wear can reflect our identity and culture. In the United States, it is common for many men and women to wear jean pants and a t-shirt when running everyday errands, such as going to the grocery store to buy food. Our everyday clothing is usually different from what we wear to celebrations, such as weddings or holidays.

STEP 2
Ask newcomers: What are your preferred everyday clothes?

STEP 3
Share with newcomers what you prefer to wear every day. Show them photos.

STEP 4
Ask newcomers: What is different about what you see Americans wearing when they go out to buy food from what you would see people wearing in your country of origin (or protection)?

STEP 5
Ask newcomers: What do you wear to celebrations, such as weddings or holidays?

STEP 6
Share with newcomers what you would wear to that event. Show them photos.
Uncover how what we Choose to Wear Reflects our Cultural Identity

Instructions Continued

STEP 7
Ask newcomers: What is different about what you see Americans wearing to celebrations from what you would see people wearing in your country of origin (or protection)?

Key Messages:
You do not have to change what you choose to wear to fit American culture. You may continue to wear the same clothing you have always worn or wear a mix of clothing from your country of origin (or protection) and from the U.S. What you choose to wear reflects your personal identity, and it is okay whether that stays the same or changes over the next few months.

Self-Reflection Activity
Reflect on a time you saw someone dressed in unfamiliar clothing. Did you make any assumptions about that person? Did you or people around you treat them differently because of the way they chose to dress? How can you help the newcomers feel welcome, included, and celebrated in their decision whether to keep or change the way they dress?

Referenced Resources

Cultural Orientation Toolkit for Community Partners and Sponsors:

CORE’s Learning Platform:
https://learning.coresourceexchange.org/index