

Developed by the Racial Equity Committee at the
Coalition on Homelessness and Housing in Ohio



COHHIO

Coalition on Homelessness
and Housing in Ohio

STRATEGIES FOR PROMOTING RACIAL DIVERSITY THROUGH INTERNSHIPS





OVERVIEW

Every year, millions of Americans experience homelessness. Black Americans are overrepresented, by three-fold, among those experiencing homelessness. In 2019, There were more Black Ohioans in emergency shelter than White Ohioans. Historic and contemporary racial inequities have resulted in this overrepresentation of people of color, particularly Black people, experiencing homelessness in Ohio and throughout the nation. The inextricable intersection of racism and homelessness requires homeless service providers to intentionally address race in their services, policies, and programs. The work of addressing racial inequities by homeless service providers requires both external and internal work by the agency. This internal work includes diversifying staff — from the frontlines to the top levels of agency leadership. The following will focus on one way to achieve this by increasing racial diversity among interns.

OBJECTIVE

Internships have become a critical experience for students and anyone training to work at — and especially lead — homeless service providing agencies. Interns learn through relevant work experiences that ultimately make them more competitive candidates to be hired by their agency and other homeless service providers. Offering these experiences to people of color, particularly Black people, will lead to an increase in professional homeless service providers of color that are currently underrepresented in the field compared to the clientele. The following strategies are presented by the Coalition on Homelessness and Housing in Ohio's (COHHIO) Racial Equity Committee (REC).

RECRUITMENT

University students in the United States are most likely to attend Predominantly White Institutions (PWIs). It is crucial that agencies recruiting from PWI campuses are actively recruiting students of color. Minority Serving Institutions (MSIs) like Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs), Hispanic-Serving Institutions (HSIs), and Tribal Colleges or Universities (TCUs) are often the most common source of recruiting diverse talent to an agency.

RECRUITMENT STRATEGIES



**Build Partnerships with
Institutions and their Students**



**Transparently Underscore
Commitment to Racial Equity**



Intentional and Direct Connection



Paid Internships



Recruitment Strategies

BUILD PARTNERSHIPS WITH INSTITUTIONS AND THEIR STUDENTS

Recruitment is most effective when it is paired with the proper university partners. Collaborating with a university's diversity unit and groups that organize students of color will make recruitment more targeted and effective. Most institutions have specific units focused on serving minority students that may be willing to collaborate and/or connect an agency with minority student groups on campus. Often, an online search of student organizations at your local institution of higher education will also yield results for minority-serving student groups including contact information. Learning about and attending relevant campus events such as minority-centered career fairs is an opportunity to recruit diverse talent.



Recruitment Strategies

TRANSPARENTLY UNDERSCORE COMMITMENT TO RACIAL EQUITY

Recruiting students that understand and value diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) will require recruiters to highlight DEI initiatives at the agency to encourage intern applications and buy-in from students. It is important recruiters are transparent in communicating the agency's commitments to DEI — including publishing information about demographics and your agency's commitment to DEI publicly online and in other communications — to make students feel more comfortable. This also offers an opportunity for the agency to receive feedback by students regarding these commitments. Students often seek out agencies that prioritize DEI and DEI should be central to any agency recruitment strategy. It is ultimately important students can see themselves in the agency.



Recruitment Strategies

INTENTIONAL AND DIRECT CONNECTION

Recruiters should find ways to make students of color feel comfortable applying by directly asking these students to apply — including following up consistently (but appropriately) to revisit the ask if a student does not respond — and offering additional information to ease feelings of imposter syndrome and curb anxieties about joining the team. A potential intern may stop responding as a form of self-preservation and it is important for an agency to take the time to build rapport with a potential applicant. If possible, recruiters should share the same identities with the students they are recruiting to better establish rapport and make students more comfortable.



Recruitment Strategies

PAID INTERNSHIPS

Internships are especially difficult for students of color when they are unpaid due to the historic wealth inequities of our country. Internships should be paid so that students of color can afford to participate in these experiences. Further, resource barriers to interning — such as transportation to work or a dress code that requires expensive clothing — should be taken into account and mitigated by the agency as much as possible.

RETENTION

It is not enough to simply recruit interns of color; interns must also feel supported. Management and supervision of interns is perhaps the most critical aspect of their experience. Without proper supervision, interns may perform poorly, resign from the position, and seek opportunities elsewhere. This turnover is costly for an organization in time, resources, and its reputation.

RETENTION STRATEGIES



Interviewing on Equity



Cultural Humility



**Hiring Diverse
Full-Time Staff**



Mentorship



Retention Strategies

INTERVIEWING ON EQUITY

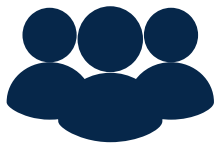
Incorporating questions on diversity, equity, and inclusion in the initial interview for the internship is important in recruiting the right applicants of any race, but also for confirming the agency's commitment to these principles. Invite the student to ask questions about equitable practices and agencies should answer honestly to avoid what may feel like a "bait and switch" for an intern, which is both unethical and could be traumatizing for them.



Retention Strategies

CULTURAL HUMILITY

Cultural humility, as opposed to cultural competency, recognizes that there is consistent learning required to even begin to understand another person's lived experience and one can never become the expert on another's circumstance. Intern supervisors should undergo regular cultural humility training and be cognizant of the specific differences in experience between them and their intern. Providing space and support for the intern's experience is also important. When appropriate, race should be discussed between supervisors and interns of different racial identities and not avoided or discounted. However, it is important a supervisor allows the intern to take the lead and centers the comfort of their intern.



Retention Strategies

HIRING DIVERSE FULL-TIME STAFF

Promoting racial diversity in the workplace requires an agency-wide commitment to diversifying all staff. Hiring racially diverse full-time staff builds a community within an agency that students of color will feel more comfortable joining and working with if allowed the space. Hiring racially diverse staff and interns creates a positive feedback loop that is a necessary part in ensuring people of color feel comfortable and their concerns are addressed at an agency. Interns will feel most comfortable with staff of their same cultural experience and agencies should strive to have several diverse communities represented within their agencies and not simply a binary of white and non-white staff.



Retention Strategies

MENTORSHIP

Interns of color should be offered opportunities for mentorship from senior staff and staff of color. Mentorship is an important aspect of the professional growth experience and network-building. Mentorship is not always about giving advice, but often listening to mentees about their experience. When possible, interns should be given mentors that share their race and other salient identities such as gender. Same-race relationships are found to be more supportive psychosocially than cross-race relationships. However, interns should also have relationships with senior leadership within an agency, even if they do not share identities.



TAKEAWAYS

Homeless service system providers, leaders, funders, and advocates that recognize the importance of racial diversity recognize its impact on agency innovation, promoting racial equity, representing all identities of clientele, and supporting the next generation of agency leaders. There is a critical need to diversify staff at all levels, but recruiting and retaining diverse talent can be difficult. Increasing the racial diversity of interns is key in diversifying an agency but it is only as effective as the support they receive once at the agency. This support includes diversifying staff at all levels and creating a robust pipeline of diverse talent entering your agency — creating a positive feedback loop of racially diverse talent. Diversifying talent is critical to the mission and success of homeless service system providers, leaders, funders and advocates; those that are unable to diversify will soon be left behind.

REFERENCES

“Diversity Recruiting: Formal Programs, Target Groups, and Sources,” *National Association for Colleges and Employers (NACE)*, January, 13, 2016, <https://www.nacweb.org/talent-acquisition/trends-and-predictions/diversity-recruiting-formal-programs-target-groups-and-sources/>.

“HUD 2019 Continuum of Care Homeless Assistance Programs Homeless Populations and Subpopulations,” *U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development*, January 22, 2019, https://files.hudexchange.info/reports/published/CoC_PopSub_State_OH_2019.pdf.

Dereck Paul, Kelly Knight, Pamela Olsen, John Weeks, Irene Yen, & Margot Kushel, “Racial discrimination in the life course of older adults experiencing homelessness: results from the HOPE HOME study,” *Journal of Social Distress and Homelessness*, December 18, 2019, <https://doi.org/10.1080/10530789.2019.1702248>

Derek Avery and Patrick McKay, “Target Practice: An Organization Impression Management Approach to Attracting Minority and Female Job Applicants,” *Personnel Psychology*, February 13, 2006, <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1744-6570.2006.00807.x>.

George Carter III, “From Exclusion to Destitution: Race, Affordable Housing, and Homelessness,” *Cityscape*, 2011, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/20868768>.

Jasmine Medina-Perez, “Reimagining the Internship to Promote Racial Equity,” *Stanford Social Innovation Review*, July 9, 2019, https://ssir.org/articles/entry/reimagining_the_internship_to_promote_racial_equity.

John Sullivan, “A 12-Step Program for Retaining Your Diverse Workforce,” *DrJohnSullivan.com*, May 25, 2017, <https://drjohnsullivan.com/articles/12-step-program-retaining-diverse-workforce/>.

Kristen Hecht, “Leveling the Playing Field: The Benefits, Challenges, and Opportunities of Internships in the U.S.,” *B.A. Rudolph Foundation*, November, 2016, <https://empowherwomen.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/10/White-Paper-FINAL.pdf>.

Marcie Fisher-Borne, Jessie Montana Cain, & Suzanne Martin, “From Mastery to Accountability: Cultural Humility as an Alternative to Cultural Competence,” *Social Work Education*, November 21, 2014, <https://doi.org/10.1080/02615479.2014.977244>.

REFERENCES CONTINUED

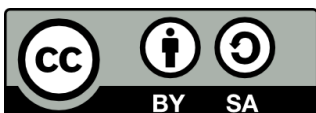
Marian Moser Jones, "Does Race Matter in Addressing Homelessness? A Review of the Literature," *World Med Health Policy*, June 20, 2016, <https://doi.org/10.1002/wmh3.189>.

Matthew Hora, "5 Obstacles that stop many students from taking an internship," *The Conversation*, January 24, 2020, <https://theconversation.com/5-obstacles-that-stop-many-students-from-taking-an-internship-130357>.

Orlando Richard, Patrick McKay, Sargam Garg, & Sasha Pustovit, "The impact of supervisor-subordinate racial-ethnic and gender dissimilarity on mentoring quality and turnover intentions: do positive affectivity and communal culture matter?" *International Journal of Human Resource Management*, June 23, 2017, <https://doi.org/10.1080/09585192.2017.1344288>.

Richard Reddick and Katie Ortego Pritchett, "'I Don't Want to Work in a World of Whiteness:' White Faculty and Their Mentoring Relationships with Black Students," *The Journal of the Professoriate*, 2015, https://caarpweb.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/06/8-1_Reddick_p54.pdf.

Robert Cramer and Steven Prentice-Dunn, "Caring for the Whole Person: Guidelines for Advancing Undergraduate Mentorship," *College Student Journal*, December 2007, https://mcnair.siu.edu/_common/documents/caring-for-the-whole-person.pdf.



This work by Coalition on Homelessness and Housing in Ohio (COHHIO) is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution-ShareAlike 4.0 International License

<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-sa/4.0/>