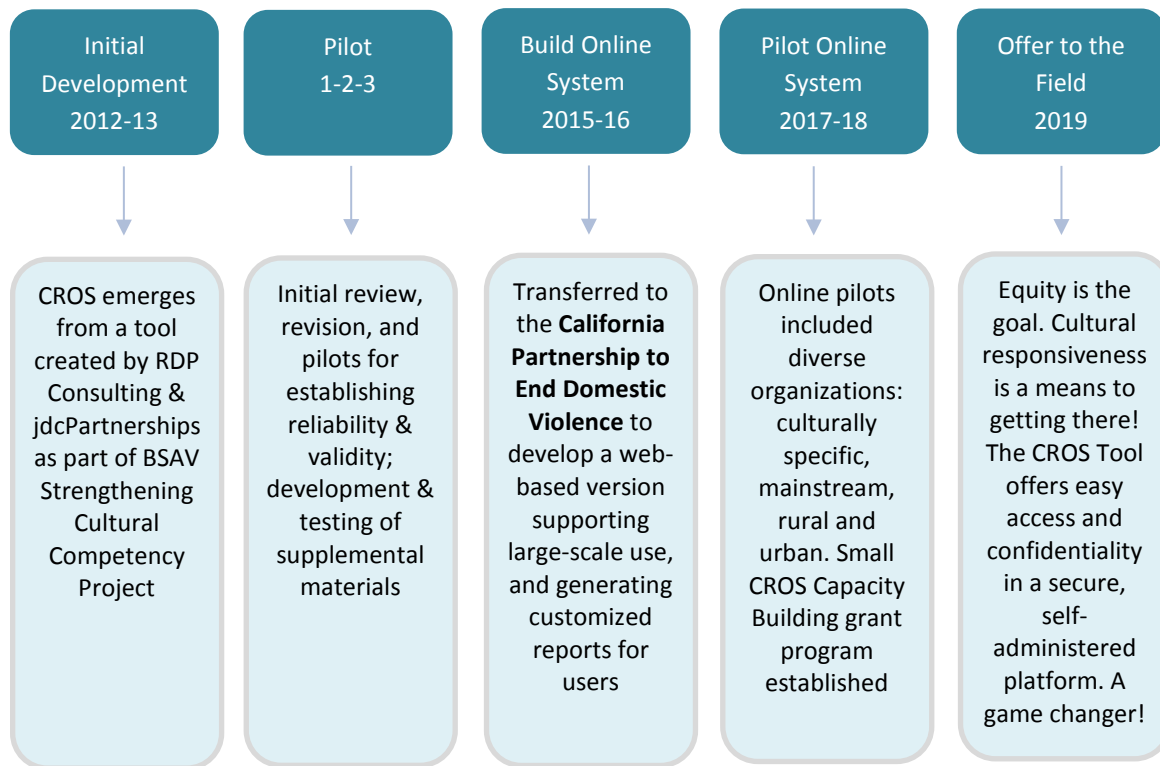


The Cultural Responsiveness Organizational Self-Assessment Tool: A Report to the Field

In 2015, the California Partnership to End Domestic Violence (the Partnership) received a tool¹ which consisted of a 20-question survey and a report template designed to assess “cultural responsiveness”.

The Partnership then proceeded to build the survey into a self-administered online tool, which is now available in English and Spanish.



The Cultural Responsiveness Organizational Self-Assessment (CROS) is now a functional web-based tool organized into nineⁱ areas. When analyzed in the aggregate, these speak to an organization's readiness to provide effective services and supports, and engage in action that is culturally responsive. The term “cultural responsiveness” builds upon traditional definitions of cultural competence to communicate the notion that it requires ongoing understanding and an adaptive stance.

We define cultural responsiveness as more than just “expressing sensitivity or concern”. It involves understanding the societal oppressions faced by various groups of people, and respecting the

¹ The development of the CROS Toolkit template was led by jdcPartnerships—now Luminare Group— in collaboration with RDP consulting, with the support of Blue Shield Foundation of California.

strengths and assets inherent in different communities. This understanding must then be reflected in program services, staffing, philosophies and policies.

CROS encourages organizations to engage in critical analysis to better understand those factors that contribute to the existence, impact, and effective prevention and treatment of domestic/intimate partner violence.

The CROS toolkit includes:

1. CROS Tool² – A survey comprising 20 questions addressing 16 domains of organizational cultural responsiveness (see example below). The questions acknowledge that culture is not neutral and different cultural groups are ascribed differential status and power. Organizations are encouraged to invite staff, board members, and volunteers to take the assessment.
2. Summary Report – This provides both a snapshot and detailed findings using a five step continuum from “not yet in place” to “sustaining”. Results are aggregated to protect confidentiality and support the organization in understanding how it is viewed overall by its stakeholders.
3. Facilitation Guide – This resource is designed to allow any organization to engage in reflection, identify strengths and determine areas for attention. It provides guidance for the composition and structure of group sense-making sessions, including framing for the analysis of the CROS data and action planning.

The questions below are examples of what can be found in the CROS tool:

CRITICAL ANALYSIS Based on your experience, please indicate how often: Our organization engages in discussions that analyze domestic/intimate partner/relationship in ways that includes the following:	ORGANIZATIONAL COMMITMENT & CULTURE Based on your experience, please indicate the degree to which the following policies and procedures are in place at your organization. My organization:
The history of the issue and how it varies/looks different in and across cultures and communities.	Has policies and procedures for reviewing and acting upon client feedback on its services.
The ways in which different cultures and communities describe, define and address this issue.	Has policies and procedures for reviewing and acting upon client feedback on its cultural competence.
The ways in which DV survivors access services provided.	Has policies and procedures for making materials (printed and electronic) affirming of the various cultural backgrounds of people served.

In November 2016, the Partnership invited eligible organizations to apply to a **Capacity-Building Small Grants** program, funded by Blue Shield of California Foundation to strengthen cultural responsiveness in the domestic violence field. The goal was for organizations to develop and sustain survivor-centered systems rooted in the cultural realities of domestic violence survivors and their families.

² <http://www.cpedv.org/cros-toolkit>

An Advisory Committee, an external evaluator—Social Policy Research—and Luminare Group, accompanied the Partnership through different stages of the project.

Eleven organizations were granted up to \$20,000 each to analyze findings in their CROS Summary Report, identify strengths and challenges, and develop and implement an action plan to build or enhance culturally responsive sustainable practices and collaborations to serve domestic violence survivors, taking into account their community specific needs.

Although the project required measurable outcomes and timelines, it was important to look at it with a broader, community lens to understand how success could be defined; it was intentionally and deliberately a fluid process to attempt change.

In some cases, participants had already identified what their next steps would be, and in others, the journey was to reflect and explore to define those steps. Sometimes during the process, the initial plan was modified to adjust to the reality not seen before. Flexible critical thinking and exploration was encouraged.

The project included a peer learning circle, with participants consistently attending monthly video conferences to share experiences and exchange support. Additionally, a two-day in-person gathering was held, promoting skills to address difficult conversations, generate strategies to challenge unconscious biases and explore alternatives for organizational transformation. An evaluation process was integrated from beginning to end, to obtain a future road map and derive lessons and promising practices for the field.

Social Policy Research (SPR) evaluation results showed that the Cultural Responsiveness Organizational Self-Assessment tool effectively captured organizations' stage of development on cultural responsiveness, and provided an effective profile of their status. Overall, this contributed to a well-rounded picture of organizational strengths and challenges.

SPR also found that, *"CROS users have increased their awareness of racial equity, oppression and privilege and acquired a "grounded understanding" of cultural responsiveness within their agency".*

Participants learned a number of lessons from their experiences:

- **Strike the right stance.** Be humble and unassuming. Embrace that you do not know everything, and that the work is a marathon rather than a sprint. Understand that cultural responsiveness work will require reflection and growth on the individual level even if the focus of the work is at the organizational level.
- **Ground work in data.** Ground cultural responsiveness plans in initial assessments and additional data (e.g., publicly available data and follow-up interviews).

"The experience has been enlightening, humbling, and revealing of some implicit biases that we unknowingly carry with us, despite trying to be vigilant about doing our work in an unbiased way. Implementing cultural responsiveness is an ongoing process that does not end with creating static policies or protocols. It needs to be something we consciously and constantly consider every day in our work and requires us to be intentional about our commitment to understanding what it means to be a culturally responsive organization, and to becoming one". — Grantee

- **Focus on the big picture.** Be clear on the ultimate goal but remain flexible on the specifics of the process. Focus on the process, not the product.
- **Have leadership signal importance early on.** From the beginning, it is critical for leadership to underscore the importance of making time and space for cultural responsiveness work within the organization. Executive director buy-in is critical to shifting the narrative around cultural responsiveness.
- **Articulate the cost up-front.** Organizations need to proactively articulate what they are willing to “let go” (e.g., in terms of other staff commitments) to prioritize this work and make it happen, allocating resources to move forward.
- **Secure engagement early and widely.** To benefit from broad-based engagement, as well as guard against staff turnover, secure the involvement (and not just the interest and support) of a strong cross-section of staff on cultural responsiveness work.
- **Be mindful of effective consultant characteristics.** Find candidates that possess multiple, intersecting areas of expertise—e.g., racial equity and cultural responsiveness, organizational development and nonprofits, evaluation, domestic violence, bilingual skills, etc.
- **Add value with an informed facilitator.** An effective consultant adds value by serving as an informed facilitator—that is, one who brings their expertise, experience and contacts to bear. This should be someone who presents options, but ultimately listens and lets the organization determine their own direction. A skilled facilitator ensures the participation of all staff members and negotiates competing interests.
- **Be mindful of multiple dimensions of diversity and culture that are not racial or ethnic.** These can include different age/generation groups within a particular community, which will require very different outreach approaches and varying degrees of success depending on established connections.

“We are striving to make cultural responsiveness a priority; many community members & survivors have stated that it makes a difference to walk into an office after a traumatic event, and see advocates that look like them, speak their language, and understand some part of their identity without them having to explain—to have advocates not re-traumatize them by showing prejudices or bias. It is our responsibility to do better to serve our underserved & unserved communities.” — Grantee

- **Consider *readiness* for outreach.** As one grantee reflected, “[We were] rightfully being checked on our agenda. Just by walking into their space, we were making an assumption that we were ready to walk into their space [without reconsidering the past history between the two organizations].”
- **Working inward before going outward.** Grantees underscored the importance of “work on the agency before we reach outward.”
- **On evaluations and promotions,** make implicit bias training and management bias self-exploration part of your annual plan, in order to ensure an equity frame for staff’ evaluations and promotions. Allocate funds for professional development and networking opportunities for direct services advocates.
- **On outreach and community education,** create guidelines that include activities on implicit bias, cultural markers, and welcoming communities’ characteristics to create awareness and safe, inclusive spaces.
- **On culturally specific services,** allocate funds to partner with/hire culturally specific organizations/programs. This will

support the development of programmatic plans instead using dollars and time to create something that already exists.

- **On self-care**, include individual and collective cultures' viewpoint of self-care, and create policies that protect them all (i.e. grieving for extended family vs. grieving for nuclear family, etc.).

Cultural responsiveness is not an end in itself; Cultural Responsiveness is a continuous examination, learning, and action toward equity. Take the next step today by registering your organization at www.cpedv.cros.org.

Contribute to the creation of a society where everyone is seen, respected and valued!

“The world we want is one where many worlds fit”.