

2020 - FAR NORTHERN REGIONAL CENTER DISPARITY AND PUBLIC
STAKEHOLDER REPORT FOR FY '18 / '19
(Finalized Dec. 2020 due to COVID-19)

How many meetings did the regional center conduct?

Far Northern Regional Center(FNRC) conducted two Public meetings this year, one in Spring, May 29,2020 and one in Fall on October 7,2020. Both meetings were virtual due to COVID-19. Originally, FNRC had planned a multi-cultural event for the spring, which would include the public meeting.

Were meetings held in several languages and/or were translators available?

Both of the FNRC virtual public meetings were held in English only. However, contact information for the presenters for the October 7 public meeting was available in our website, which is able to be translated in other languages, should any member of the community want or need any information regarding this meeting. Furthermore, one of the presenters, the Cultural and Diversity specialist is bilingual (English-Spanish) and was ready to translate the presentation as needed for Spanish speaking stakeholders. Additionally, the fall public POS Data presentation had a Spanish PowerPoint ready to share with stakeholders if needed.

Were meeting materials provided in several languages?

All of the reading materials were electronic PowerPoint presentations in English. However, as stated above, a Spanish copy of the POS Data presentation was available to stakeholders upon request.

What date(s) and time(s) did the regional center conduct the meeting(s)?

FNRC originally scheduled the Spring public meeting as part of a Multi-Cultural event hosted by FNRC in March, however due to COVID-19, FNRC conducted the spring public meeting on May 29th, during the public portion of the FNRC Board meeting from 9:00am-12:00pm. The fall public meeting was held on October 7th from 11:30pm-1:00pm.

How were meetings scheduled to accommodate community participation?

The May 29th meeting was held during the public portion to invite our community members to participate. The October 7th meeting was in afternoon around lunch time to accommodate working schedules.

How did the regional center ensure that all voices were heard, regardless of race, national origin, income, etc.?

FNRC ensured that stakeholders were comfortable to ask questions by ensuring that the presenters' contact information was available to the public in our website as well as having time for questions and comments after each public meeting.

What was reported to be valuable or important to the community being addressed?

The attendee commented positively on FNRC using a team approach and suggested we expand to offer peer leadership opportunities to our clients and families during our Fall public meeting.

How were the cultural and linguistic needs of the communities taken into account?

Although this meeting was in English, upon the posting of the meetings in our website, we had our presenters' contact information, in case attendees wanted or needed further explanation of the presentations. Furthermore, our website, where our calendar is posted, has the ability to translate our posted information in other languages.

How did the regional center communicate the goal or purpose of the meeting?

Far Northern posted the public meeting dates, time and zoom meeting information in our website's calendar of community events as well as announced the dates in the board meetings.

Was the meeting conducted in a format that allowed attendees to feel comfortable and interact with each other (e.g., small group conversations)?

Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, our public meetings were held in zoom. The virtual meetings presented and held as virtual townhalls, so everyone was in the same meeting, and there was no opportunity to have small group conversations.

What did attendees perceive as the purpose of the meeting?

The attendees perceived this meeting as a way for Far Northern Regional Center to be transparent and show the public how we are doing using statistics. This meeting also had a time for attendees to discuss the information given, as well as comment on desired changes or the date itself.

What, if anything, did the regional center do differently this year to improve public attendance and participation?

- ***What was/were the outcome(s)?***
- ***How many attendees were expected? How many attended?***

- ***What concerns were expressed in the past from your community? How was this used to guide new actions/strategies in increasing attendance and participation?***

Due to Far Northern holding virtual public meetings, we were able to hold one meeting (one in spring and one in fall) available and open to our clients in all of our catchment area. This meant that more people were able to connect rather than having individual Chico and Redding meetings, having an opportunity for our Northern and Southern county stakeholders meet. We did not expect too many attendees due to the combination of the meeting being virtual and the COVID-19 Pandemic. We had all the board members present in our Spring meeting and one board member and one DDS representative attend our Fall meeting.

FNRC is aware that just putting presentations with data does not attract attendance, and thus FNRC planned on hosting an event in Anderson, CA(Shasta County) called “A Celebration of Culture through the Arts”, where FNRC staff, stakeholders, vendors and the community were invited to attend. During the event there was a plan for booths with staff from foods from their families and cultures as well as Folklorico and Hmong dance presentations.

Did the regional center include/collaborate with partner agencies or community partners?

Were they included/invited to the meetings?

FNRC collaborates with several different agencies in our disparity efforts. In the past several years, we worked with Northern Valley Catholic Social Services (NVCSS) to implement a Promotoras Program in our catchment area. In addition, we worked with Native American Training and Technical Assistance (NATTA) as a partner with their grant, mutually supporting each other’s efforts towards diversity and inclusion. Through these partnerships, both the regional center, NATTA and NVCSS worked with various vendors and agencies such as the State Council, Office of Client’s Rights Advocacy, Rowell Family Empowerment, and Level Up NorCal to support inclusion activities and speak at meetings promoting increased awareness of the disparity and efforts to address inequality.

All of these agencies were invited to the meetings, but none attended. It is our experience that these meetings need to have something to attract the public and partner agencies. A purely data driven meeting discussing disparity numbers may be required by law, but by itself it is not a popular meeting. Before COVID-19 started, we had plans to include a cultural awareness activity with various types of ethnic food and a diversity discussion. Because of COVID, we moved this to zoom and were unable to provide the popular activity that increases attendance.

What outreach efforts were considered and utilized?

Before COVID, as stated before, FNRC planned to attach a cultural awareness event focusing on ethnic food and cultural traditions to the required public meeting. To publicize this event, we planned to work with the State Council, NATTA, Level Up NorCal, and our vendor community to spread the word about the event. In the past, similar activities increased attendance at the public meeting dramatically.

Since COVID arrived, we moved the event to zoom and still publicized it through our web page, Facebook page, mailing list along with asking our community partners to do the same. Despite this, attendance was almost non-existent.

What actions were successful? What actions were unsuccessful in relation to outreach?

The most important action we have ever taken in regards to this event is to attach the required public meeting to another diversity related event that is more social or interesting to the community. We have found that the heavy data-driven requirements of discussing disparity, POS utilization and multiple slides of graphics only interests a small set of the public. Most people also want to understand and feel more about the issue than listening to a numbers discussion. Situations like what occurred this year with COVID, where we had to focus on the required part of the public meeting only is unsuccessful as it results in minimal attendance.

Was a copy of meeting minutes and attendee comments submitted with the report?

Since we did not have any public attendees (other than the DDS liaison, and State Council representative), we did not have any comments to submit with the report.

What did attendees express as challenges they face?

N/A – see response to question above.

Does the data indicate a need to reduce disparities in purchase of services?

The data FNRC has continues to show a disparity between the services authorized and utilized when comparing white clients and families with non-white clients and families. This disparity historically has been the greatest with our Southeast Asian population and the best with our African American clients (which has no disparity). Our Latinx community's disparity is only slightly better than what we are seeing with the South East Asian community.

The reasons for this continue, high-cost services such as respite and residential care are not as favored culturally with both groups. At the same time, highly requested services such as social recreation are still suspended. In addition, these historically marginalized groups do not have the self advocacy skills or information that is available to many of our Caucasian families.

If so, briefly describe the types of disparities that were discussed (e.g. by race/ethnicity, age, etc).

The presentation discussed the disparity by race, ethnicity, age, and residence. It was noted in the presentation that the disparity is smaller when looking at children in early intervention and the first few years. In turn, the disparity is greater when looking at adults. This shows the impact of culture and services. Latinx and South East Asian families show very little interest in residential care; often stating that “we take care of our own”. Many families discuss how they could not imagine a stranger taking care of their son, daughter and felt it was a family responsibility. Caucasian and African American families in turn place their children in residential facilities at much greater numbers. In fact, many of these families see residential care in terms of leaving home or other milestones in adult development.

We also briefly discussed barriers to services – the lack of language and culturally proficient staff working with vendors. There is a lack of urgency for many vendors given the small numbers of non-white clients and the inability to compete with better funded employers.

In developing the recommendations and plan to address disparity,

- ***What process and resources were used to engage a variety of stakeholders/***
- ***What venues were utilized to gather information (i.e. public meetings, support groups, board meetings)?***
- ***What information was obtained through those processes and resources?***
- ***How did input from the community help guide/develop new or ongoing strategies***
- ***What proposed strategies and/or plan will be implemented to meet the communities’ expressed needs?***

Before the implementation of the ABX2 grant program, FNRC conducted focus groups in several large communities in our catchment area with high non-white populations. To increase attendance we offered child care and refreshments. The meetings ranged from 21 in Orland to about 5-7 at our meeting in Chico.

We revisited the focus group model again in 2019 and both sessions showed the same general themes, with a few exceptions. The first focus groups showed the community had a number of misunderstandings about the regional center. Many families believed we were a state or federal agency and reported immigration status. Some did not understand what respite was and many families lacked basic information about the role of the regional center.

The second series of focus groups showed that our efforts to engage and educate the community were successful. We had far fewer families report confusion about respite or the role of the regional center. Most families knew we were not a state or federal agency and concerns about reporting immigration status did not come up.

The basic needs of the community did not change from one focus group to another. Families continue to request social programs for their children and young adults. They described the isolation they experience by having a disability compounded by language and cultural differences. Many more families appeared open to using respite, but only if they could hire family members or friends. For the most part, families were reluctant to leave their children with strangers. Very few Latinx or S.E. Asian families were interested in residential care and as in the previous focus group meetings, felt long-term care was a family responsibility.

It was apparent in both focus group meetings that both groups were far more reluctant to contest a decision by FNRC or any other agency they disagreed with when compared to Caucasian families. As a result, these families miss possible compromises or alternatives that we commonly offer when negotiating with families.

As a result of all of these focus groups FNRC started the Promotoras Program, initially with NVCSS to serve our catchment area. In the first few years, this program helped close our disparity slightly and increased the use of respite significantly. Because this program was so successful, we decided to institutionalize it into our operations as a vendored service.

How were strategies communicated to the community?

We communicated these strategies mostly through the work of our Promotoras who were (and still are) in the homes and lives of our clients. The personal touch is the best way to reach people effectively. In addition, we posted disparity information on the agency website and Facebook page.

Our bilingual staff was also involved in the implementation of our Promotoras program and communicated with families about the plan informally and by providing access to Promotoras and the community presentations and events they planned and conducted.

Did the meeting allow an opportunity for attendees to respond to proposals and/or strategies?

The meeting allowed this, but given the lack of attendance no response was noted, other than the one noted above.

How have the plans and recommendations from the prior annual report been implemented and what have been the outcomes?

Covid-19 affected all of our outreach plans and hopes for 2020. We planned to implement the Promotoras program across the catchment area. In addition, through various community events, presentations and trainings, we hoped to engage our target communities and improve connections and understandings about FNRC. Covid delayed the vendorization of our Promotoras providers by several months. In addition, the restrictions on in-person meeting hampered their ability to engage with clients and families. Outreach efforts were reduced and moved on-line, limiting participation across the board.

Despite these problems, the Promotoras implementation is fully running now in most counties and families are beginning to engage with the program and are seeing its benefits. We are also seeing a steady increase in the number of Latinx clients referred to FNRC and found eligible. Many families report they learned about FNRC through Promotoras related interactions (family members, Promotoras workers, participation at community events, etc.).

In our annual report we also made recommendations beyond the control of Far Northern. Specifically, the removal of the restriction on funding social programs dating back to 2008 (AB9), the need for increased pay for bilingual direct-care staff, and the need to examine the disparity situation through a class-based perspective. These issues still remain a concern and are unaddressed. Families consistently request social program to address isolation issues related to disability and culture. Our vendors do not have the capacity to compete in the labor market when looking for culturally aware and bilingual staff. This limits our ability to provide the services families need and will access.

The lack of a class based analysis of the disparity issue is an ongoing concern. Since the regional center system does not look at family income when funding services (for the most part), we have families with advanced degrees and a strong understanding of bureaucracy advocate for extensive services. At the same time, we see many lower income families don't even ask for help because they lack the cultural capital to navigate our bureaucracy or that of any other agency. Although we see this issue the most in our non-white communities, it exists to some degree among all racial and ethnic groups.