

National Association of Ecumenical & Interreligious Staff
Professional Development and Standards Committee

**Frequent Patterns, Perceptions and Misconceptions in
Searching for and Hiring Racial/ethnic Staff
for Ecumenical Work**

MISCONCEPTION: That a racial ethnic, once hired, can "deliver" that ethnic church/community.

There must be a recognition that there exist historical patterns of racism and exclusion that have kept racial ethnic churches out of traditional ecumenism, and that racial ethnic congregations have not forgotten those patterns.

The newly hired racial ethnic person must not be viewed as "handling" the minority churches/community, and thus left "to do it" alone. White staff must continue (or begin) to make overtures to the sought after groups for inclusion on boards, committees etc. and joint strategizing should be employed.

PERCEPTION: That "Ecumenism" as conceived, structured, and practiced by traditional ecumenists (white) is ecumenism.

Historically, racial ethnic churches have always worked ecumenically within their communities. It is within these groups that collaboration on issues, events, and worship, such as revivals, have always existed. These are expressions of ecumenism and should not be seen as something separate.

PATTERN: Racial ethnic staff are often hired at low/lower salaries than would be offered white males pursuing similar positions.

The temptation to save precious funding dollars when the time comes to recruit racial ethnic staff should be avoided. Organizations need to put their best efforts (offer) forward in recruitment to help insure the best possible candidates apply and are subsequently hired.

PATTERN: Once the candidate is hired, there is often a feeling that the job is done. The pattern results in lack of support for the new staff person, thereby increasing the risk of failure (and certain frustration on the part of all concerned).

Be prepared for, and make certain there is, a period of "mutual" learning during a time of orientation.

Resist the tendency to over-indulge and patronize good candidates. Allow them the opportunity to hold their own.

PATTERN: Once hired, racial ethnic staff are frequently powerless to make decisions and/or initiate legitimate overtures to build collaborations, collegueship, etc.

Desired contribution levels may not be able to be established in the beginning phases of recruiting racial ethnic churches to ecumenical entities. A period of cultivation and ownership must first be developed. Often, the option of waiving or postponing a requirement for a particular level of support cannot be chosen or taken by the racial ethnic staff person. In other words, the aforementioned staff person is often given the authority to do what is expected.

The role/responsibilities of the sought after racial representative is often unclear or altered after hiring. The racial ethnic staff person may or may not be aware of such changes, thereby re-enforcing their actual powerlessness in the organization.

PATTERN: Once racial ethnic staff establish inroads to minority communions, and minorities begin to join boards, committees, plan events (i.e., embrace traditional ecumenism), the racial ethnic staff person frequently experiences a withdrawal of support.

This withdrawal may come in the form of little or no support and/or non-attendance at planned events, and/or withdrawal of the staff person's authority/power to make decisions, etc.

Withdrawal appears to stem from a "perceived threat" on the part of the hiring/supervisory entity. Possible sources of tension are:

- 1) Success of the staff person (where perhaps success has been elusive before the hiring);
- 2) "Too many" racial ethnics entering the organization;
- 3) Changing power/direction base.

CAUTION: Care should be taken in every phase of searching for and hiring a racial ethnic individual. The hiring entity should examine their feelings throughout this process to avoid unreal expectations, and to overcome possible bias that would make difficult a mutually satisfying period of employment. Such care and continuing self-examination will greatly increase the probability of a mutual meeting of needs and successful inclusivity.

(These guidelines were compiled by racial ethnic ecumenical and interfaith staff members of NAES, approved by the NAES Committee on Racial Ethnic Inclusivity, and approved by the NAES membership meeting in July 1991. They are recommended for careful thought and study by the members of local and regional Boards, Search Committees, and Personnel Committees.)

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