

CULTIVATING CULTURAL SENSITIVITY IN HOUSING COUNSELING

Tampa Bay, FL - [Housing and Education Alliance \(HEA\)](#) is a HUD-approved housing counseling agency and a member of the NCLR Homeownership Network, where it serves a large Hispanic community in the Tampa Bay area. All of its programs are culturally sensitive. Hispanic, White, African-American, Asian, married, single, gay, straight, veteran, all religions, old and young are all welcome there.

As the daughter of Cuban immigrants, Sylvia Alvarez, HEA's Founder and Executive Director said, "the greatest gift my parents gave me was, by their example, teaching me to be 'Culturally Sensitive.' Although it didn't have a name back then, they instilled in her the value of seeing all human beings as equal. That everyone has trials and tribulations and that everyone hurts, and everyone bleeds the same. They taught her to be kind and compassionate and care about her fellow man and woman.

Growing up, she watched them travel the country to demonstrate for racial justice, human rights, women's rights, gay rights and every worthy cause they believed in. Although she didn't know it at the time, she believes that this was the greatest gift they could have ever given her. She believes that Cultural Sensitivity in the workplace starts with management and by example. She has had many roles in her lifetime and brought this value with her to every workplace and every situation.

Cultural Sensitivity may mean different things to different people. At HEA it means having the skill set that enables one to learn about people who may look different, worship differently or have different customs and treat them all with respect and dignity. Having a culturally sensitive housing program starts with employing staff of varied demographics who are themselves mindful of others feelings.

At HEA, the board, staff and volunteers are Hispanic, African-American, Asian and White. In addition to its mission statement, HEA adheres to a list of core values which staff is required to employ in their daily work. These were adopted from [Raza Development Fund](#) and although they are all very important, the two core values that are most relevant here are Respect and Dignity.



- **Respect** – Respect and have compassion for every individual and family regardless of their circumstance or stage of life.
- **Dignity** – Value the intrinsic worth of every individual one interacts with and commit to treating clients, partners, and colleagues with dignity.
- **Integrity** – Affirm the necessity for high ethical and moral standards in fulfilling the mission. Understand that success is directly related to maintaining these standards in interactions with all clients and partner organizations.
- **Honesty** – Take responsibility for engaging in and inviting open and honest communication with clients and partners in order to provide the level and intensity of services that are most needed.
- **Trust** – Strive to develop mutual trust with clients and partners. Accept that trust must also be earned and understand that without trust relationships, the vision and mission of their organization are vulnerable.
- **Transparency** – Require transparency in relationships with clients and partner organizations, while fulfilling the obligation to maintain confidentiality.
- **Accountability** – Believe in making commitments to clients and fulfilling those commitments to the best of one's ability.
- **Professionalism** – Insist upon giving one's best effort and strive to be respectful and forthright as well as fair and compassionate.

People will forget what you said, people will forget what you did, but people will never forget how you made them feel.

Maya Angelou