



## **The Circle of Change - Building a Network for Belonging for Families Raising Children who are Deaf or Hard of Hearing**

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Understanding the impact of culture on health and education is an important consideration to serving, providing outreach, and engaging families of children who are Deaf and Hard of Hearing (DHH) to be involved in their child's life. Culture frames and shapes how we see the world and the experiences we have. Making a conscious effort to connect with families respectful of their culture. This approach can positively shape how parents/caregivers view their child's diagnosis and guide the decision-making process. When professionals, health care providers, and educators understand what distinguishes the family's cultural values, beliefs, and practice from their own they are more likely to have positive interactions with patients and their families.

To improve the quality and to ensure equity there is a need for systemic transformation to serve all families of DHH Children, especially from traditionally underserved and underrepresented communities. Hands & Voices has implemented a training based on strength-based initiatives to drive change in the system of care that families receive with a focus on building a foundation of understanding of the concepts of cultural competency, social determinants and the value of cultural resiliency as a strategy to improve health and education quality and equity in all systems that serve children who are Deaf and Hard of Hearing.

### **Cultural resiliency and systems change**

Hands & Voices Headquarters has been working to build a community that serves all families by enlisting the power of diverse family leadership and creating a culture of change to elevate the voices of leaders of color, creating opportunities for engagement and learning from parent

leaders from diverse backgrounds, building a better understanding of the disparities that exist and recognizing the need to be a part of the solution. The H&V HQ Latino Advisory Council and the H&V HQ Deaf/ Hard of Hearing Infusion Council exemplify how Hands & Voices actively engages community members. These councils provide a platform for individuals to contribute to initiatives, foster learning opportunities, and ensure that their input is meaningfully integrated into the organization's efforts

### **Where it started: AFFIRM**

The *AFFIRM: Leaders of Color* Training was an idea put forth by diverse leaders from Hands & Voices who saw a need to address equitable and inclusive opportunities in the community. The purpose of the *AFFIRM: Leaders of Color* Training was to acknowledge the value, importance, and necessity of diverse leadership. Leaders of color were invited to a forum among family and professional leaders in the field of deaf education at all levels. The hope was to create sustainable diverse leader-to-leader support, thus providing continued support to underserved and underrepresented populations.

The training allowed a brave space for sharing personal experiences servicing underrepresented communities. This leadership group found the commonalities of the struggles and inspiration of a support network to continue the work they do. Building a better understanding of the unique challenges and roadblocks of traditionally underserved and underrepresented populations is necessary to drive continued quality improvement efforts and to identify the gaps in systems that affect children who are Deaf and Hard of Hearing.

The positive reviews of the presentations and DEIA Workshops at the National Early Hearing Detections and Intervention (EHDI) and Hands & Voices Leadership Conferences highlighted the need for more intensive training and engagement opportunities that were led by leaders of color. These presentations touched on the importance of cultural competency, core values & culture, and social determinants of health and education through the lens of diverse leaders given the opportunity to share their lived experiences and how it influences the care they provide to the communities they serve.

### **Hands & Voices Headquarters Strategic Plan**

The 2022-2026 H&V HQ Strategic Plan places an overall emphasis in four main goal areas: Leadership, Capacity, Influence and Evidence. Within these areas diverse leadership and increased support to underserved families play a primary role in the strategies addressing the growth and sustainability of the organization during this period.

In October of 2022, the Hands & Voices Board and Staff participated in a retreat focused on improving leadership from traditionally marginalized groups within the organization, emphasizing both immediate actions and long-term strategies. This information was used to prioritize and infuse the organization's strategic plan for 2022-2026 and to create activities as a result of the retreat.

- A Podcast was developed to discuss racial issues of the time within the black communities within our organization.
- Scholarships for marginalized community parent leaders were allocated for the 2023 and 2024 H&V Leadership.

- The expansion of opportunities for diverse parent leaders was enhanced.
- A training curriculum that is offered yearly to our organization’s leadership was developed and implemented since that time. (See more information below about the ‘Circle of Change’).
- Long-term goals included developing Diversity, Equity, Inclusion and Accessibility (DEIA) training models and expanding collaboration at the chapter levels.

These plans demonstrate Hands & Voices commitment to fostering a culture of inclusion and equal access at every level.

## **Representation at HQ and Chapters including populations served**

Representation within HQ staff, board, leadership, and advisories was assessed and is reflected here:

- H&V HQ has ten staff, five of whom are from underrepresented populations (DHH and/or culturally diverse).
- H&V HQ Board has 8 board members, 6 are from underrepresented populations.
- H&V HQ has 8 Latino Council members from a variety of national origins.
- H&V HQ has 30% of FL3 Advisory members from underrepresented populations.
- H&V HQ has eleven DHH Council members across degrees of hearing difference, modality, ethnicity.
- FL3 measures from reported from 2020-2024 show an over 30% increase of underrepresented populations trained.
- FL3 measures over the last 12 months (2024) show 80% of webinars included DEI representation within the slides and/or as presenters.
- Increased accessibility within published webinars and training including ASL, Spanish captioning, and forums delivered in Spanish.

Product development within the H&V structure has increased through:

- Focus on DEIA in all social media/marketing.
- Language and Literacy Tip Sheets all in Spanish.
- Grant awarded for advocacy work in Spanish.
- The H&V Educational Advocacy Guidebook was translated into Spanish.
- Fostering Joy Journal was translated in Spanish.

## **H&V Chapter data**

The following graph shows diverse support to families including leadership representation across chapters as seen from the data reflected below. Here is a comparison of the Hands & Voices race/ethnicity representation data with the latest U.S. national statistics:

<b>Race/Ethnicity</b>	<b>U.S. Population (2025) *</b>	<b>Hands &amp; Voices (2024)</b>	<b>Hands &amp; Voices (2023)</b>	<b>Hands &amp; Voices (2022)</b>	<b>Hands &amp; Voices (2021)</b>	<b>Hands &amp; Voices (2020)</b>

<b>White</b>	74.7%	60%	65%	70%	75%	70%
<b>Hispanic/Latino</b>	21.9%	18%	13%	13%	13%	11%
<b>Black/African American</b>	13.7%	7%	7%	5%	5%	6%
<b>Asian</b>	6.6%	5%	5%	3%	2%	3%
<b>American Indian/Alaska Native</b>	1.4%	1.2%	2%	3%	2%	2%
<b>Non-White (Other/Mixed)</b>	3.6%	8%	8%	6%	3%	7%

*\*According to estimates by the U.S. Census Bureau*

- The Hands & Voices data shows a higher percentage of non-white representation compared to the national averages, particularly among mixed-race or other non-white categories.
- Hispanic/Latino representation in Hands & Voices has increased slightly over the years, with a significant jump in 2024, comparing closer to national statistics.
- Black/African American representation in Hands & Voices is significantly lower compared to the U.S. population.
- American Indian/Alaska Native percentages on average over 5 years, appear at or higher in the Hands & Voices data than the national average.
- White representation within Hands & Voices fluctuates but remains lower than the national demographic.

This comparison can help assess inclusivity and guide outreach strategies.

### **Language representation:**

Between 2020 and 2024, there was notable progress in documenting non-English language use across chapters, reflecting growing inclusivity:

- **2020:** 31 chapters reported fourteen languages, with Spanish (20), ASL (25), Arabic (6), French (4), and Mandarin/Cantonese (3) being the most common.
- **2021:** Expanded to thirty-two chapters identifying fifteen languages. Spanish (23), ASL (24), and French (5) increased slightly, while Arabic (5) and Cantonese (1) showed adjustments.
- **2022:** Marked a significant rise to twenty-six languages, with new additions like Amharic, Armenian, Bengali, BSL, Chinese, Greek, Italian, Japanese, Korean, Punjabi, Somali, Swahili, and Urdu. Spanish (28) and ASL (26) usage saw further growth.

- **2023:** 31 Chapters identified twenty-four languages. **2024:** 29 chapters reported twenty-two languages.

Overall, the accessibility and representation of languages consistently grew, highlighting the chapters' commitment to embracing linguistic communities.

### **Webinar participation (FL3):**

The FL3 Center tracked demographic information of participants for across webinars provided for training as noted below:

- **December 2021 (141 participants):**
  - 50% suburban, 34% urban, 16% rural.
  - 65% White, 15% Hispanic, 14% Black, 3% Asian, and others.
- **April 2022 (94 participants):**
  - 50% suburban, 25% urban, 25% rural.
  - 66% White, 10% Hispanic, 10% Black, 5% Asian, and others.
- **August 2023 (259 participants):**
  - 50% suburban, 25% urban, 25% rural.
  - 61% White, 17% Hispanic, 10% Black, 3% Asian, and others.
- **August 2024 (1090 participants):**
  - 57% suburban, 24% urban, 22% rural
  - 75% White, 14% Hispanic, 5% Black, 6% Asian, and others

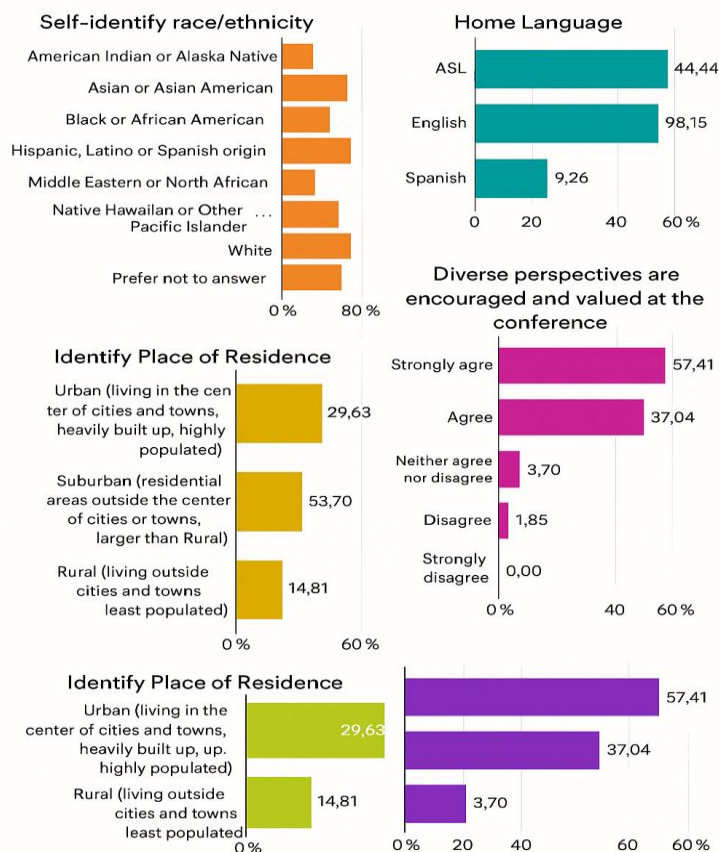
### **Are You Being Counted Survey Responses:**

Prior to establishing demographic information gathered in registration data, The FL3 Center conducted a survey to determine representation by those who received technical assistance or attended training from the center. Results show (of those responding to the survey):

- **2020-2021 (269 responses):**
  - 58% suburban, 22% urban, 20% rural.
  - 80% White, 9% Hispanic/Latino, 4% Black, 3% Asian, and others.
- **2021-2022 (118 responses):**
  - 78% White, 14% Hispanic/Latino, 5% Black, 3% Asian/Pacific Islander, and others.

### **2024 Hands & Voices Leadership Conference survey results**

Below, you will see the responses of registrants for demographics, and survey results from those who responded about the quality and representation of underserved families:



The expanding language accessibility within the chapters reflects a promising future of inclusion, where languages like Spanish, ASL, and Arabic act as bridges connecting communities across cultural and geographic boundaries. As suburban areas continue to anchor demographic representation, there is an exciting opportunity to leverage this presence to amplify outreach and engagement in other regions. The consistent representation of Hispanic/Latino and Black populations, alongside the majority, signals a growing commitment to creating spaces where all voices can contribute and thrive. This steady progress points toward a future where equity and representation are not only valued but embedded into every layer of the organization's work. Together, these trends underscore a vision of collaboration and inclusivity, fueling a shared journey of growth and transformation.

The 2024 Hands & Voices Data Report highlights the remarkable strengths of its chapters in advancing inclusive excellence & equity through thoughtful and impactful initiatives. Chapters demonstrated commitment to expanding outreach by engaging underserved families and translating resources into Spanish, while enhancing online presence to foster interaction through social media. DEIA principles are being integrated into activities, board discussions, and training, alongside focused efforts to recruit diverse board members, including Deaf/Hard-of-Hearing (DHH) individuals. Strategic planning and financial sustainability are prioritized through reviewing plans, establishing committees, and seeking alternative funding sources to eliminate barriers like membership fees. Chapters further strengthen community engagement by promoting event attendance and diverse representation and contributing educational value

through submissions to *The Communicator*. Finally, they are forward-thinking, developing leadership sustainability strategies that ensure long-term organizational stability. Collectively, these initiatives highlight the chapters' dedication to inclusivity, resourcefulness, and progress.

### **Key initiatives:**

Our H&V Chapters annually report goals associated with support to underserved families in their communities. In the 2024 Hands & Voices annual data survey, chapters were asked to develop three goals, with at least one prioritizing reaching underserved communities to carry forward into their overall chapter goals for the year. The following is a summary of the responses:

- **Expanding Outreach:** Increase engagement with underserved families, including translating resources into Spanish.
- **Strengthening Online Presence:** Enhance interaction on social media pages.
- **Equitable & Inclusive Opportunities):** Incorporate DEIA principles into chapter activities, board discussions, and training.
- **Board Development:** Recruit diverse board members, including Deaf/Hard-of-Hearing (DHH) individuals, and ensure leadership training.
- **Strategic Planning:** Review existing plans, establish board committees for events, fundraising, and membership.
- **Financial Sustainability:** Seek grants and alternative funding sources to eliminate membership fees.
- **Community Engagement:** Increase event attendance, promote family involvement, and recruit diverse representation.
- **Educational Contributions:** Submit articles for "The Communicator" and ensure timely submissions.
- **Succession Planning:** Develop leadership sustainability strategies for long-term organizational stability.

While many of the chapters reported having actively implemented the H&V DEIA Guidelines, others are either in the review phase or yet to begin, presenting opportunities for further engagement and support:

- **Reviewed and Incorporated:** 17 Chapters reported that they have reviewed and incorporated the guidelines into their activities and training.
- **Reviewed but Not Yet Incorporated:** 14 Chapters mentioned that they have reviewed the guidelines but have not yet incorporated them.
- **Not Yet Reviewed or Incorporated:** 13 Chapters indicated that they have not reviewed or incorporated the guidelines at all.

## **H&V HQ Training, Curriculum and Vision**

Hands & Voices seeks to build upon the past by continuing to meet the goals of the organization in what is currently being implemented, and what we hope to do in the future.

### **H&V Circle of Change Training Curriculum**

On September 20, 2024, Hands & Voices launched its first official training where attendees received a *Certification of DEIA Training*. The session was accompanied by a set of pre-session exercises that included:

- Cultural Competency Assessment.
- Exercises in identifying Health Disparities by State.
- Information on How Culture Influences Health.
- Early Childhood Development and Education- Healthy People 2030.
- The Power of Privilege: A TED Talk presented by Tiffany Jana.

The participants were divided into small group discussions that were led by Hands & Voices leaders of color. Through these discussions the participants were asked to reflect on barriers that they have experienced serving diverse families and understanding how their own expectations, perceptions can often be a barrier to how we deliver service to others.

**Cultural competence** - Reflecting on barriers that they have experienced by serving diverse families engaged in conversations to build a better understanding of their own expectations, perceptions can often be a barrier to service delivery to diverse populations.

**Core values & culture** – Highlighting the importance of understanding other’s values when it comes to work and serving the community and how our core values shape decisions and how we interact with others.

**How culture influences health**- Key points of cultural humility, understanding about diverse historical models of health beliefs and traditions, and overcoming cross-cultural communication challenges.

**Social determinants and health equity**- Basic knowledge of the 5 Domains of Social Determinants of Health (Economic Stability, Education Access and Quality, Healthcare Access and Quality, Neighborhood and Built Environment, and Social & Community Context) the barriers that exist, and why the goal of Health Equity is important.

**Power & privilege** - This exercise focuses on understanding identities that experience privilege and others who experience oppression. Individuals often have multiple and intersecting identities. This exercise gives attendees insights into how to listen to and express ourselves with others, holding ourselves and others responsible for our actions in communication. We can learn to be allies and advocates.

**Systemic change for families of children who are Deaf and Hard of Hearing** - An opportunity to learn how to use the *H&V Advancing DEIA Guidelines* as a resource to better serve a diverse population. The purpose is to develop an action plan for programs and services to take back to their organizations and put their knowledge to work.

## **Summary of learning session feedback**

This summary reflects the key takeaways, appreciation, and constructive feedback from attendees



**Positive aspects:**

- The majority of attendees found the session informative, with high levels of agreement on its value.
- Most participants felt the session would be useful in achieving program or organizational objectives.
- Attendees appreciated the opportunity to learn about inclusivity and different perspectives.
- Several praised it as an excellent learning experience, providing meaningful takeaways.
- The implicit bias activity prior to the workshop was well-received.
- Some noted that the session challenged their thinking in a constructive way.

**Areas for improvement:**

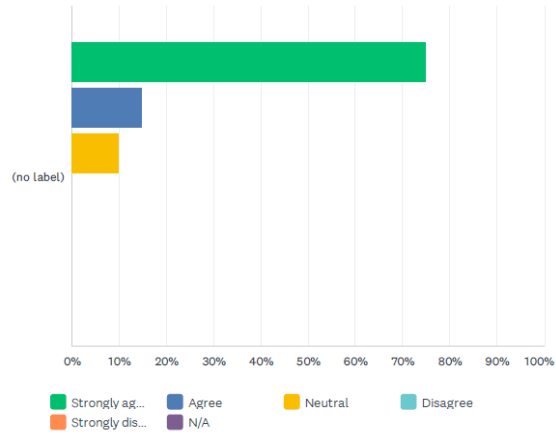
- Some participants felt the session was too parent-oriented, suggesting a need for broader representation, especially from individuals with lived experiences.
- Inclusion and accessibility concerns were raised regarding group dynamics during discussions.
- Some felt the session provided awareness but lacked clear actionable steps for implementing DEIA principles.
- The physical setup of the room was noted as a barrier to engaging discussions.

**Suggestions for future sessions:**

- Diversify Representation – Ensure individuals with lived experiences are involved in discussions and planning.
- Enhance Accessibility – Improve session structure to allow for more inclusive interactions.
- Provide Clear Actionable Steps – Include real-world examples or activities to support DEIA implementation and create time in the agenda for teams to work on action plans.
- Adjust Room Setup – Create a physical environment that encourages open dialogue between all participants.

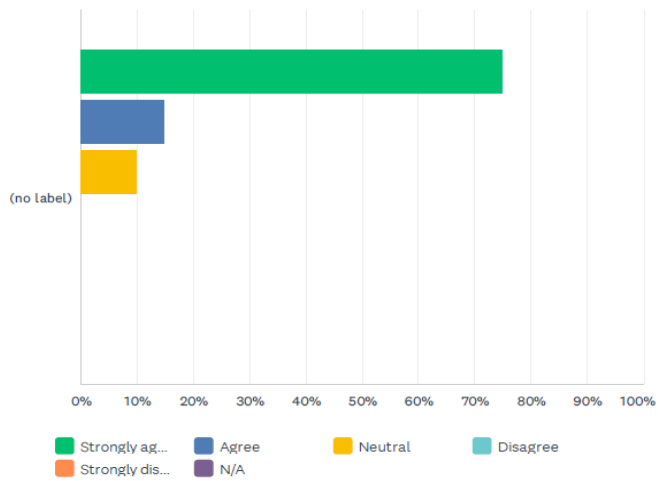
Q1 I learned new information as a result of having attended this session.

Answered: 20 Skipped: 0



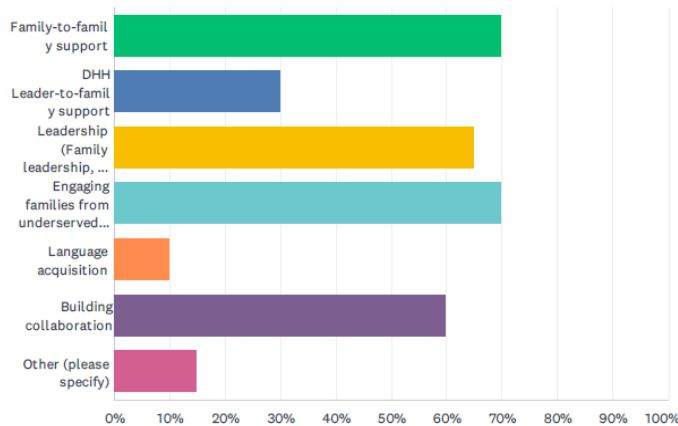
Q2 Information from this session will assist me/my organization in achieving program/organizational objectives.

Answered: 20 Skipped: 0



Q3 This session supported my development/learning of: (check all that apply)

Answered: 20 Skipped: 0



### **Hands & Voices Circle of Change: A Network for Belonging**

As a result of past efforts and our vision to move forward, Hands & Voices will expand the Circle of Change Curriculum/Training to continue its work through the *Network for Belonging Initiative*. This initiative aims to build on current successes and create structured actionable strategies across the existing Hands & Voices and FL3 Network, focusing on leadership development, diverse representation, and fostering inclusivity. The initiative involves current and forward-thinking goals and activities through work groups, collecting data, securing funding, and ensuring sustainable strategic execution.

### **Learning from past efforts**

Incorporating lessons learned from past efforts is critical. This initiative is born out of recognition by diverse leaders at Hands & Voices of the need for dedicated spaces to address building a culture of inclusion that allows leaders to share personal experiences and build networks of support while addressing challenges faced by traditionally underserved populations. These efforts laid the groundwork for future initiatives, such as:

- **Understanding Common Struggles and Inspirations:** AFFIRM facilitated conversations about the roadblocks faced by leaders serving underrepresented communities. Identifying these struggles provides an opportunity to address systemic gaps impacting DHH children.
- **Creating Sustainable Leader-to-Leader Support:** By nurturing support networks, AFFIRM helped develop a framework for ongoing leadership development. Applying these concepts to new work groups can foster collaboration and mentorship among diverse leaders, ensuring continuity in support.
- **Driving Quality Improvement Efforts:** AFFIRM emphasized the importance of understanding unique challenges to inform quality improvements. This approach should

be embedded into the periodic work groups to maintain focus on underserved populations.

Through integrating these experiences and lessons, the work groups can move forward with culturally and linguistically relevant strategies, actionable steps, and sustainable leadership solutions tailored to empower communities and families in need.

### **Future directions**

Below are strategies to consider for the next phase of the H&V HQ Strategic Planning and related efforts.

#### **1. Convene periodic work groups**

- **Establish work groups dedicated to leadership development and inclusion:**  
Create specialized work groups focusing on key aspects such as leadership development, inclusion, cultural competency, and DEIA principles. These groups will act as think tanks to generate innovative ideas and strategies tailored for underserved and underrepresented communities, such as families with children who are Deaf and Hard of Hearing (DHH). Drawing inspiration from past efforts like the AFFIRM: Leaders of Color Training, this initiative should include diverse leadership to ensure representation of various perspectives and experiences.
- **Set a regular meeting cadence with stakeholders:**  
Schedule consistent, periodic meetings with stakeholders to ensure alignment and progress. Stakeholders may include educators, families, community leaders, and healthcare professionals who serve DHH populations. Using lessons from events such as the National EHDI and Hands & Voices Leadership Conferences, these meetings can prioritize engagement and elevate the voices of Leaders of Color in discussions about DEIA strategies.
- **Gather feedback from curriculum insights for continuous improvement:**  
Develop feedback loops based on curriculum and training outcomes. The insights gained from initiatives like AFFIRM can serve as valuable resources for iterating and improving materials. For example, the success of DEIA Workshops focusing on Cultural Competency, Core Values, and Social Determinants of Health highlighted a demand for more intensive leader-led training.
- **Continue to infuse DEIA within all the projects/programs at H&V:** To ensure that efforts made to support underserved families are not an isolated experience or effort, we are committed to seeing this work reflected in all that we do at H&V.

#### **2. Strengthen data collection & resource sharing**

- Enhance the H&V database to inform decision-making through objectively measuring participation and leading training and technical assistance; Develop a systemwide

centralized database that captures demographic, service quality, and community-specific data to support informed decisions and policymaking.

- Use tools like [County Health Rankings and Roadmaps](#), [Area Deprivation Index](#), [Healthy Places Index](#) to share data, uncover disparities, and align statewide strategies. This helps foster consistency and equity across inclusive initiatives. Highlight the promising practices from chapters to promote learning.

### **3. Establish a DEIA advisory committee**

- Establish a dedicated DEIA advisory committee building on the past efforts including AFFIRM and the CIRCLE of Change curriculum to provide strategic input for all related initiatives to the staff designated DEIA Consultant, Board of Directors, and Executive Director.
- Assign a liaison to improve leadership buy-in: Designate a Hands & Voices Board liaison to facilitate communication, build leadership commitment, and coordinate DEIA efforts across stakeholders.
- Engage leaders from H&V Board, DHH Council, and Latino Council to champion DEIA values and ensure alignment with organizational goals.

### **4. Refine activities as needed**

- Analyze current and planned tasks related to Diversity, Equity, Inclusion, and Accessibility (DEIA), and adjust over time as needed so that everyone understands their role in improving clarity and effectiveness.
- Collaborate with H&V Latino Council to Integrate Insights: Partner with Latino Council members to integrate culturally and linguistically relevant insights into strategies and operations.

### **5. Communication & scale impact**

- Draft a Strategic Messaging Plan: Develop a robust messaging plan to share progress, outcomes, and stories of impact from DEIA initiatives. This promotes transparency and reinforces commitment.
- Utilize Community Engagement Events: Host events, webinars, and forums that spotlight progress, foster community connections, and celebrate success stories to build trust and momentum.

These strategies position Hands & Voices to take meaningful next steps toward lasting equity, inclusion, and leadership that reflects the communities we serve.

The Hands & Voices Circle of Change is a transformative movement built on the *Pillars of Caring, Integrity, Respect, Conviction, Leadership, and Excellence*. It fosters knowledge, understanding, and a cultural shift towards a shared community by amplifying diverse lived experiences, finding commonalities, and celebrating interdependence.

The Network for Belonging Initiative framework integrates leadership, systemic change, and advocacy to establish a support network for families of children who are Deaf and Hard of Hearing (DHH). Leadership within this movement is shared, rather than confined to a single authority—educators, practitioners, families, and community members all play a vital role. Parents are critical advocates, often navigating systemic barriers. Committed leadership, advocacy, and systemic reform grounded in Belonging, Access, and Representation principles can bridge this divide.

The Hands & Voices Circle of Change Curriculum/Training and the vision for a *Network for Belonging Initiative* is dedicated to fostering belonging and empowering every person to positively influence the community supporting d/hh families. Its mission is to spark systemic transformation through collective leadership, ensuring equitable services and a more inclusive future.



- Increasing knowledge and understanding of differences
- Shifting culture towards a shared community
- Sharing personal stories of diverse lived experiences
- Finding commonalities in our narratives
- Celebrating how likeness creates interdependence
- Empowering our village to elicit systemic transformation