

Grand Challenges for Social Work: Mission and Principles

Our Vision

Grand Challenges for Social Work (GCSW) will shape a more positive future for our society by promoting Grand Challenges that are culturally relevant, attainable, generative, multidisciplinary, scientifically sound, and sustainable. We focus on innovations to solve social problems, especially those that disproportionately impact the most vulnerable in our society. Complete elimination of injustices and inequities due to race, ethnicity, religion, sexual and gender identity and expression, abilities, custom, class or any other human difference is foremost in this vision.

Our Mission

Our mission is:

- To identify major social challenges for the nation
- To gather evidence based on rigorous science
- To design effective and culturally relevant solutions
- To promote policies and professional practices that lead to positive change
- To advance sustainable initiatives that achieve the greatest positive impacts for *all* families and communities, Tribal Nations, and society as a whole.

Our Domain

The domain of Social Work can be summarized by the words *social, scientific, and application*.

Social is fundamental. Humans are highly social and social interactions are the most influential force on our planet. Social relationships in families, communities, organizations, education, and governance are basic to human growth, problem solving, and achievements of all kinds. Social relationships ultimately account for the most important advances in health, daily functioning, political stability, and world peace. GCSW is committed to strengthening our capacity to engage in productive relationships that enhance well-being, reduce conflict, and bridge across the many factors that divide us. We support the design and implementation of positive social interventions rather than coercive measures for problem solving and social control. We support delivery of programs and services that arise from, and strengthen, positive and healthful social relationships and institutions.

Scientific means knowledge and understanding achieved through the collection and analysis of evidence. To be sure, social work operates with commitment, but that commitment is guided by science. GCSW values high quality, scientific analysis that provides direction for the development and improvement of practices, programs, and policies in addressing the Grand Challenges. We engage in rigorous research and draw on high quality research by others. The selection and use of research methods must always be consonant with the other values embodied in GCSW.

Application refers to putting knowledge to use for positive impact. Social work is an applied profession. We are not content just to know; we aim to know and do. The simple word “do” has huge ramifications. In knowledge building, social work must be as scientific as any academic discipline, but *this knowledge must also inform meaningful and consequential action*. This is a very high bar, requiring careful selection of issues and research questions; testing solutions that are efficient, scalable, and sustainable; and then making those solutions real and relevant in the world.

Our Guiding Principles

The Grand Challenges for Social Work are grounded in a set of core principles that reflect the deepest commitments of the profession. These universal guiding principles are what social workers hold to be most worthwhile. They provide the aspirational conditions that shape our science and our professional practice and guide us in our unwavering commitment to reduce human suffering and increase human development and potential. Moreover, they guide inquiry and pathways toward

solutions; they direct the choices of interdisciplinary and professional collaborations, and they inform the ultimate test of our outcomes.

Grand Challenges for Social Work (GCSW) embraces social justice, inclusiveness, diversity, and equity. These principles are far more than guidelines, and even more than intended outcomes. For social work, these principles are the pillars of outlook and action. These four pillars shall provide the foundation for all GCSW initiatives as they take form and substance.

Social Justice: We strive to create a more socially just and equitable society through the science and solutions of the GCSW. We support diversity, community, intergenerational collaboration, and empowerment through GCSW networks and coalitions. We promote GCSW research on social, racial, Tribal, gender, and economic justice (among others) and utilize social justice principles to tackle societies' grandest challenges.

Inclusiveness: We embrace diverse ways of knowing and methodologies to procure culturally and scientifically rich approaches that could produce meaningful, culturally relevant, and impactful solutions. Everyone can and should be involved. The science and potential solutions for Grand Challenges are strengthened when the communities most affected have genuine voice, collaborative power, and authentically contribute to GCSW efforts.

Diversity: We value the unique historical and cultural legacies and experiences of diverse populations, their contributions to society and community, and their partnership in the science and solutions in all GCSW initiatives. We value, respect, and support the cultural dignity and worth of all individuals, genders, races/ethnicities, abilities, communities, populations, religions, and nationalities.

Equity: Economic systems and strata of power confer extravagant privileges to some, while prohibiting equal access for all, thus begetting inequity and injustice. Enacting equity means we must continuously tackle and challenge exclusive and unfair systems as they emerge in GCSW, including the social and political arenas in which problems are produced and sustained, and in the science that examines societal grand challenges. Equity embodies values, worldviews, practices, and policies that ensure that all people—including but not limited to those who have been historically underrepresented based on race/ethnicity, tribal status, age, disability, sexual orientation, gender, gender identity, socioeconomic status, geography, citizenship status, or religion—are represented in the development of GCSW; particularly in initiatives that address population-specific grand challenges. Equity also embraces diverse areas of knowledge and ways of knowing in the development of collaborative and equitable scientific and community-based partnerships and empirically-based solutions.

Challenging our inequities and working in partnership is the vehicle by which GCSW takes hold and promotes social change. All communities and populations deserve access to a full and healthful life which is essential to a democratic society.

The four pillars of *Social Justice, Inclusion, Diversity, and Equity* together define an active, ongoing process requiring critical, continuous, and deep engagement by everyone to promote relevant and effective social solutions in our own time, and for future generations.

The GCSW embraces these four pillars through:

Discovery and Innovation. Exploration and bringing to light new and diverse knowledges and ideas to improve research practices in the service of producing meaningful social solutions to address societies' and vulnerable communities' grandest challenges.

Excellence. Creation and production of the highest quality and culturally relevant science, methodologies, interventions, and services to achieve Grand Challenge objectives.

Integrity. Carrying out our research and all GCI activities with the utmost care, responsibility, and accountability to the communities and constituents we collaborate with, represent, and serve.

Service. Beneficial GCSW research, practice and policy solutions that serve and respond to the priorities and needs of the communities we collaborate with and serve.

Impact. Identify and create GCSW that serve to produce the highest levels of innovation and impact in partnership with and for the greatest benefit to the communities we serve.

Our Guideposts for Action

The Principles of GCSW shall be embodied and realized by:

Welcoming Process. Nurturing a GCSW culture of open-mindedness, compassion, and inclusiveness among stakeholders and groups.

Broadening Inclusion. Actively building GCI that have a broad and diverse range of scientific and communal voices, cultures, life experiences, and backgrounds.

Creating Opportunities. Creating opportunities for critical engagement, discourse, and education related to issues of social justice, inclusiveness, diversity, and equity across and within GCSW initiatives.

Opening Up to All Perspectives. Embracing diverse worldviews, methodologies, and scientific approaches to ensure cultural relevance of GCSW and that the solutions proposed are culturally safe, meaningful, sustainable and have benefit to the community.

Engaging Purposefully. Dynamically building community, tribal, agency, and multi/transdisciplinary collaborative partnerships throughout the GCSW.

Recognizing Contexts. Acknowledging the reality and impact of historical and contemporary settler colonialism and supporting research that endeavors to empower Tribal Nations' restoration of sovereignty and well-being and eradication of the deleterious intergenerational impact of chattel slavery, among other atrocities targeting particular communities, people, nationalities, or identities. Recognizing the underlying roots of societies' grandest challenges includes examining the historical and bio-socio-political contexts in which social problems take root, grow, and reproduce in order to mitigate or eradicate the deleterious impact of oppressive policies and practices through GCSW initiatives.

Embracing Resistance, Resilience and Resurgence. Recognizing and respecting the power of communities and their strengths, including resistance, resilience and resurgence of healthful practices that generated community and familial well-being and survival.

Evaluating Accountability. Building the process for analysis of how our research, education, and professional practice results in measurable population and systems level change.

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