

Engaging the Right Partners

Tips for Ensuring a Culturally Competent Collaboration

Cultural competence describes the ability of an individual or organization to interact effectively with people of different cultures. It also means being respectful and responsive to the health beliefs, practices, and cultural and linguistic needs of diverse population groups¹. Effective collaboration depends on cultural competence. With it, we are able to better understand who our prospective partner is, what is important to them, and how they view substance misuse in their community. Culture competence helps to assure that all players can contribute to the larger success of the collaboration. This, in turn, leads to improved outcomes.

Although cultural competence isn't a quick fix and can't be accomplished simply by following a set of culturally-sensitive rules and recommendations, here are some tips for increasing the cultural competence of your collaborative efforts:

- **Make sure that all printed, digital, and audiovisual materials reflect the culture, preferred language, and background of the populations they are meant to serve.** For example, in tribal communities, symbols have significant meaning, as do colors. There are many dialects in the Spanish language; therefore, some terms and their uses can vary depending on the audience's country of origin. Understanding and using the most appropriate terms and phrases for your intended audience helps to ensure that materials are welcomed and not deemed offensive.
- **Connect with culturally relevant organizations to be your outreach ambassadors.** For example, if your organization focuses on substance misuse prevention among college students and you would like to reach Latino college students, partner with a Latino organization on campus to help you reach these students. The Latino organization will know the best ways to communicate to Latino college students and help your outreach efforts succeed.
- **Invite a member from the community to co-present.** This will help to ensure that your audience feels like they are being heard and represented in a discussion, and conveys the message that the knowledge and experiences of community members are respected. For example, if you are hosting a presentation about the rising use of injection drugs by black men who have sex with men (MSM), ensure that a member from the black MSM community is presenting or co-presenting the materials.

¹ Brownless, T., & Lee, K. (2015). Building culturally competent organizations. Retrieved from <http://ctb.ku.edu/>

- If making a presentation, **practice remarks with an interpreter (if using one) to rehearse pacing and translation pauses—that is, the time it takes for the interpreter to translate content from one language to another.** For example, Spanish uses more words than other languages. As a result, when translating from one language to Spanish, there is a median duration pause of 100 milliseconds longer than for other languages. This helps to reduce confusion among audience members.

For more information about cultural competence, visit <http://www.samhsa.gov/capt/applying-strategic-prevention/cultural-competence>.