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Cultural Brokering

G u i d e



Collective Progress

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History

Cultural Brokering



Culture sensitivity is a strong factor in cultural brokering. It is defined as an awareness by one person of the differences in values, beliefs, and behaviors of another, including the awareness that these values, beliefs, and behaviors are an integral part of the person's worldview and lifestyle (Jezewski, 1990)

Cultural brokering is a concept grounded in anthropology and can be applied to situations where a middleman or go-between is present or needed to link diverse groups within a variety of social situations. Jezewski (1990) defined it as the act of bridging, linking, or mediating between groups or persons for the purpose of reducing conflict or producing change.

The concept of cultural brokering has evolved considerably since its introduction and is now present in several American departments and institutions, such as immigration, health care, education, and human service agencies. During the 1960s, researchers began to use the concept of cultural brokers within the context of healthcare delivery to diverse communities. Wenger (1995) defined cultural brokering as “a health care intervention through which the professional increasingly uses cultural and health science knowledge and skills to negotiate with the client and the health care system for an effective, beneficial health care plan.”

Culture sensitivity is a strong factor in cultural brokering. It is defined as an awareness by one person of the differences in values, beliefs, and behaviors of another, including the awareness that these values, beliefs, and behaviors are an integral part of the person's worldview and lifestyle (Jezewski, 1990). Cultural sensitizing refers to sensitizing oneself and/or others to the cultural differences of others and applying this information to effect culturally appropriate provision of services.

Research has documented that culturally diverse families are more likely to suffer from isolation, stress and anxiety because they are living within two cultures, the original culture from their home country and the new culture of the host country. This experience can be impacted by factors such as languages, cultural traditions, religious practices, stigma, social status, community contexts and different or even conflicting beliefs and values about disability and service systems (Pang et al., 2020).

Roles

Cultural Brokering

The Need for Cultural Brokering

Cultural Brokering is a valuable service that is useful in the context of American diversity. Cultural brokers can mediate information when:

- diverse belief systems related to child and family health, healing, and wellness exist
- cultural variations in the perception of child and family health, healing, and wellness are present
- diverse cultural influences on help-seeking behaviors and attitudes toward state agencies are prevalent
- there are several indigenous and traditional health practices that exist among many cultural groups
- formal education may not have provided many agency service providers with the knowledge and skills needed to effectively address cultural differences in their communities of practice
- the need for cultural and linguistic competence in service delivery systems is emerging as a fundamental approach in the goal to eliminate racial and ethnic disparities

Location

Cultural brokering can occur within an institutional setting and also outside the institutional settings. Within the institutional setting, cultural brokering can prevent conflicts between providers and recipients, while outside, it can occur to facilitate support by negotiation, mediation, advocacy while securing appointments, securing services, etc.

Numerous rationales exist for the use of cultural brokers in the delivery of care and services.

Cultural Brokering

- can anticipate or recognize problems in service delivery and can broker to prevent or resolve these problems
- can bridge gaps where there are problems in the transaction of cultural meaning
- can mediate, where mediation of knowledge is necessary
- can mediate between different value systems or between lay, popular, or professional traditions
- can manipulate information, instructions, and messages
- can also be interpreters

Mediators

Cultural brokers can help to address the historical and inherent distrust that many racially, ethnically, and culturally diverse communities have toward state and federal institutions (National Center for Cultural Competence, 2005). Two elements are essential to the delivery of effective services: (1) the ability to establish and maintain trust and (2) the capacity to devote sufficient time to build a meaningful relationship between the provider and the consumer. Cultural brokers employ these skills and promote increased outreach of government institutions within their respective communities. Cultural brokers often can bridge this chasm of distrust that many cultural communities have toward data and researchers. Cultural brokers can be instrumental in reestablishing trust and reinforcing the importance of participating in research, particularly related to the elimination of racial and ethnic disparities in child welfare.

Cultural Guides

Cultural brokers not only understand the strengths and needs of the community, but also are cognizant of the structures and functions of the institutions that they represent. Cultural brokers can assist in developing educational materials that will help consumers learn more about the institutions and functions. They also can provide guidance on implementing workforce diversity initiatives. Some organizations that are well connected to the communities they serve use a community member as a cultural broker because of the member's insight and experiences. A critical requisite for the cultural broker is having the respect and trust of the community. Using a community member as a cultural broker is acknowledgment that this expertise resides within the community. This approach also allows the institutions to provide support for community development (National Center for Cultural Competence, 2005).

Liaisons

Cultural brokers are knowledgeable in two realms: (1) the values, beliefs, and practices within their cultural group or community and (2) agency or system that they have learned to navigate effectively for themselves and their families. They serve as communicators and liaisons between the consumers and the providers in the agency.

These personnel can play a critical and beneficial role on a personal level, in the community in which they live, and on a professional level, in their respective agencies or practices. These personnel effectively bridge the two worlds.

Catalysts for Change

In many ways, cultural brokers are change agents because they can initiate the transformation of an institution by creating an inclusive and collaborative environment for providers and consumers alike. They model and mentor behavioral change, which can break down bias, prejudice, and other institutional barriers that exist in service delivery settings. They work toward changing intergroup and interpersonal relationships, so that the organization can build capacity from within to adapt to the changing needs (Heifetz & Laurie, 1997) of the communities they serve. Whatever their position or roles, cultural brokers must have the capacity to:

- assess and understand their own cultural identities and value systems
- recognize the values that guide and mold attitudes and behaviors
- understand a community's traditional beliefs, values, and practices and changes that occur through acculturation
- understand and practice the tenets of effective cross-cultural communication including the cultural nuances of both verbal and non-verbal communication
- advocate for the consumer, to ensure the delivery of effective services

Roles

Identifying Cultural Brokers

Cultural brokers may be any of the following persons:

- outreach and lay agency worker
- peer mentor
- community member (family member, consumer)
- administrative leader
- nurse, physician, physical therapist, or health care provider
- social worker
- interpreter
- program manager
- health educator
- board member
- program support personnel

Settings where cultural brokers may work:

- community health centers
- community-based organizations
- government offices
- churches, mosque, kivas, plazas, temples, and other places of worship
- schools, universities
- hospitals
- faith-based organizations
- migrant communities

Whatever their position, cultural brokers aim to build an awareness and understanding of the cultural factors of the diverse communities they serve and of the ways in which such factors influence communities. Cultural brokers may not necessarily be members of a particular cultural group or community. However, they must have a history and experience with cultural groups for which they serve as broker including:

- the trust and respect of the community
- knowledge of values, beliefs, and health practices of cultural groups
- an understanding of traditional and indigenous wellness and healing networks within
 - diverse communities
- experience navigating child welfare systems and supportive systems within communities.



Opportunities

Enhanced Delivery and Benefits to the Consumer

Enhanced Delivery

Cultural Brokers can work with community members in ways that institutions cannot. Cultural brokers can:

- assess the values, beliefs, and practices related to health in the community being served
- enhance communication between consumers and other providers
- advocate for the use of culturally and linguistically competent practices in the delivery of services
- assist with efforts to increase access to services and eliminate racial and ethnic disparities
- help institutions elicit more in-depth information that will assist with better assessment of needs and provide more effective options
- help institutions communicate effectively with consumers to improve outcomes

With increased and more effective relationships with communities, institutions benefit in multiple ways as shown below:

- service providers can become more knowledgeable of and connected to the communities they serve
- service providers can create a reputation for being committed and inclusive community partners, which improves access and use
- service providers can increase cost effectiveness in service delivery by decreasing return visits, miscommunication, and confusion from consumers who did not clearly understand protocols or options
- service providers can engender mutual respect and trust within the communities they serve, which assures sustainability

Benefits to the Consumer

- Consumers who have positive experiences with cultural brokers will be more likely to continue to access services, which potentially improves outcomes for children and reduces disparities
- Consumers will recognize the institution's commitment to deliver services in a manner that respects and incorporates their cultural perspectives
- Consumers may be motivated to seek support sooner when they know that providers understand and respect their cultural values, beliefs, and practices
- Consumers may be able to communicate their needs more effectively and better understand their options
- Consumers who benefit from this approach may also encourage others within their community to access and use services. This approach has the potential to positively impact children and families of the entire community (National Center for Cultural Competence, 2005).

Essential Components

Principles, Knowledge, Skills, and Awareness

Essential Principles

Honoring and respecting diverse characteristics and the complexity of inter and intra community dynamics are inherent in providing culturally and linguistically competent service delivery.

- Cultural brokering honors and respects cultural differences within communities by
 - recognizing and responding to cultural difference within communities, including those whose members speak the same language
 - acknowledging the strengths of bicultural and multicultural practitioners and staff
 - being knowledgeable of group differences including how individuals self-identify
- Cultural brokering is community driven
 - a major principle of cultural competence and community engagement is the recognition that communities determine their own needs
 - organizations that have structures and personnel to gauge the strengths, perceived needs, and preferences of diverse communities are well positioned to integrate a cultural brokering program
 - asset mapping assists institutions in identifying community members who have a natural instinct for listening to, leading, and organizing their peers and who can function more effectively as cultural brokers at multiple levels
- Cultural brokering is provided in a safe, non-judgmental, and confidential manner
 - Institutions must ensure that cultural brokering programs are conducted in a safe, non-judgmental, and confidential manner. This requirement means that each aspect of this principle is incorporated into the organizational philosophy, infrastructure, and practice model. This includes, but is not limited to, articulating values and principles, and establishing procedures to ensure that providers, staff, cultural brokers, and consumers understand and accept this approach to service delivery
- Cultural brokering involves delivering services in settings that are accessible and tailored to the unique needs of the communities served
 - to meet the unique needs of communities, institutions must have the capacity to provide services through non-traditional approaches, particularly in relationship to where, when, and how such services are provided
 - it is essential that cultural brokering programs have the resources and flexibility to adapt to the community context and the lifestyles of individuals served
- Cultural brokering acknowledges the reciprocity and transfer of assets between the community and institutional settings
 - the interchange of skills and knowledge between health care organizations and communities is a dynamic occurrence. Culturally competent institutions recognize and acknowledge that inherent in any community are resources and assets to support service delivery.

Essential Components

Principles, Knowledge, Skills, and Awareness

Knowledge Skills, and Awareness

Collaborative relationships, facilitated by cultural brokering, between institutions and communities have many benefits. Cultural brokers require a set of competencies that enable them to work cross-culturally and that include, but are not limited to, awareness, knowledge, and skills as described below.

Awareness. Cultural brokers are aware of

- (1) their own cultural identity
- (2) the cultural identity of the members of diverse communities
- (3) the social, political, and economic factors affecting diverse communities within a cultural context

Knowledge. Cultural brokers innately understand

- (1) values, beliefs, and practices associated with wellness, and well-being of cultural groups
- (2) traditional or indigenous care networks within diverse communities
- (3) health, wellness, and mental health care systems (e.g., history, assessment, protocols, and interventions)

Skills. Cultural brokers have a range of skills that enable them to

- (1) communicate in a cross-cultural context
- (2) communicate in two or more languages
- (3) interpret and/or translate information from one language to another
- (4) advocate with and on behalf of consumers
- (5) negotiate care and other service delivery systems
- (6) mediate and manage conflict

Commensurate with the conceptual framework of cultural competence, the knowledge and skill levels of cultural brokers are also along a continuum. Knowledge acquisition is not a discrete process; instead, it evolves over time leading to levels of proficiency



Implementing and Sustaining a Cultural Brokering Program

Checklist

An institution may require a cultural brokering program if it recognizes and acknowledges that there are sociocultural differences between themselves and the people to whom they provide services, and these differences are manifested in lifestyles, systems of beliefs, and in models of health, wellness and safety.

A systematic approach is necessary to fully implement and sustain a cultural brokering program in institutional settings. This approach will require vision and commitment of leadership, buy-in or acceptance of both the community and personnel, development of a framework for the cultural broker program, and identification and allocation of resources. Institutions that have these key elements are most likely to support and sustain cultural broker programs. The following checklist may be used as a guide to implement and sustain a cultural brokering program:

VISION AND COMMITMENT OF LEADERSHIP

- ☐ Verify there is commitment, value and respect for the diverse groups and abilities represented in the organization's community. This should include visible goals and values within strategic plans and company profiles, etc. that establish this commitment, value, and respect
- ☐ Conduct a process for creating a shared vision and commitment for implementing and sustaining a cultural broker program
- ☐ Identify and include key community constituencies in this process who represent interests of the diverse communities served
- ☐ Ensure that both formal and informal leadership is represented
- ☐ Ensure that personnel at all levels of the organization are represented and are encouraged to assume leadership roles
- ☐ Commitment to and established policies and processes (e.g. performance measures) that ensure practices, processes and materials are changed to better align with communities served



Implementing and Sustaining a Cultural Brokering Program

Checklist

BUY-IN AND ACCEPTANCE

- ☐ Collaborate with key community constituencies to promote cultural brokering as an approach to enhance access to, use of, and satisfaction with services delivered
- ☐ Engage personnel in a series of interactive discussions to help them understand how a cultural broker program benefits them, the consumers they serve, the institution and diverse communities
- ☐ Provide information, including benefits and outcomes, to institutional personnel and the community about organizations that are implementing cultural broker programs
- ☐ Sponsor events where communities and cultural brokers share their strengths and expertise with organizational staff and collaborating partners

FRAMEWORK FOR A CULTURAL BROKER PROGRAM

- ☐ Convene a work group to guide the development of the framework that defines the parameters of a cultural broker program within the institutional setting and the community it serves
- ☐ Clarify values and philosophy that support cultural brokering within the practice model
- ☐ Create, review, and amend policies that ensure the implementation of a cultural broker program
- ☐ Establish an infrastructure to support cultural brokering (see below)

BUY-IN AND ACCEPTANCE

- ☐ Conduct asset mapping to identify cultural brokers at multiple levels
- ☐ Protect cultural broker workloads so that time is allocated for relationship building.
- ☐ Build in pathways for advancement of cultural brokers within the agency
- ☐ [Sample Job Description](#)

An illustration at the top of the page shows several hands of different skin tones reaching up to hold together dark-colored puzzle pieces. The background is a solid dark red color.

Implementing and Sustaining a Cultural Brokering Program

Checklist

PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

- ☐ Build out a professional development model that includes onboarding, training, ongoing coaching and supervision that promotes and establishes key knowledge and skills of cultural brokering.
- ☐ [Sample list of staff development topics and activities](#)

LOCATION AND SCHEDULING OF SERVICES

- ☐ Cultural brokering is necessarily a person-centered approach. This means meeting people where they are. Consider a community-based model that allows brokers to drive where people are.
- ☐ Provide reimbursement for mileage, coffee, and lunches.
- ☐ Explore risks and benefits of being able to transport people. Time spent in transport, eating, or drinking coffee together are effective facilitators of engagement.

INFRASTRUCTURE

- ☐ Establish memorandums of understanding (MOUs) with collaborating agencies or programs
- ☐ Identify a data management system to track process, member satisfaction, and effectiveness of the program
- ☐ Establish or verify policies and procedures promote safe, non-judgmental, confidential, and culturally responsive service (confidentiality, code of conduct, ethics, and performance management process)
- ☐ Establish an evaluation process for continuous improvement. Identify program and performance metrics that measure trust, inclusion, collaboration, strengths-based approaches, progress toward change, satisfaction and or person-centeredness, and access
- ☐ Determine objectives and timelines for implementing the program

An illustration at the top of the page shows several hands of different skin tones reaching up to hold together dark-colored puzzle pieces. The background is a solid dark red color.

Implementing and Sustaining a Cultural Brokering Program

Checklist

IDENTIFICATION AND ALLOCATION OF RESOURCES

- ☐ Develop a budget that allows relationship building, reimbursement of mileage, coffee, and lunches, proper training and ongoing professional development
- ☐ Identify or reallocate fiscal resources to support the program
- ☐ Identify personnel who are interested and have the capacity to function as cultural brokers from both the institutional setting and the community
- ☐ Identify personnel responsible for managing or coordinating the program
- ☐ Ensure management personnel have knowledge and skills in relation to staff-centered supervision, cultural responsiveness and brokering, trauma-responsiveness, and wellness/self-care
- ☐ Collaborate with key community constituencies to identify and access non-fiscal resources to support the program (e.g., location and physical settings, information dissemination, and cultural and community informants)

Job Description

Cultural Broker

Reports To:	Effective Date:

Department:

Training or Certificates

Indicate here

Job Summary

Provide a brief, four-sentence description of the role, what success in the position looks like, and how it fits into the company or organization overall.

Education Level: Non required

Strengths and Attributes

- Cultural sensitivity: Honors and respects diverse characteristics and the complexity of inter and intra-community dynamics
- Ability to speak and converse in the languages of the communities they represent
- Respected and trusted in the communities they represent
- Self-aware, including one's own cultural identity
- Self-reflective and open to feedback
- Ability to sit with discomfort
- Engages effectively in difficult conversations
- Recognize the values that guide and mold attitudes and behaviors of the communities they represent and those of the dominant culture
- Recognizes and responds to cultural differences within communities, including those whose members speak the same language
- Recognizes and maximizes strengths of bicultural and multicultural practitioners and staff
- Empathic and aware of others, including
 - the cultural identity of the members of diverse communities
 - the social, political, and economic factors affecting diverse communities within a cultural context

Physical Requirements

- Prolonged periods of sitting.
- Willingness to drive or take public transportation to meet with people.

Qualifications

Knowledge and or Experience

- History and experiences of cultural groups
- Knowledgeable of group differences, including how individuals self-identify
- Values, beliefs, and practices, including those associated with wellness and well-being of cultural groups
- Traditional or indigenous care networks within diverse communities
- Health, wellness, and mental health care systems (e.g., history, assessment, protocols, and interventions)
- Child welfare and or other systems relevant to the organization's services or population's needs, including navigation
- Experience with change and ability to reflect and apply this experience when working with others.
- Traditional beliefs, values, and practices and changes that occur through acculturation
- Cross-cultural communication, including the cultural nuances of both verbal and non-verbal communication

Job Description

Qualifications

Skills

- Application of knowledge and experience with cultural groups to affect culturally appropriate provision of services.
- Cross-cultural communication
- Bi-lingual or multilingual
- Interpretation
- Translation of information from one language to another
- Advocacy
- Negotiation and navigation between care and other service delivery systems
- Mediation and conflict management
- Elicitation of strengths and needs
- Navigation of structures and functions of institutions
- Assessment and understanding of cultural identities and value systems
- Person-centered service

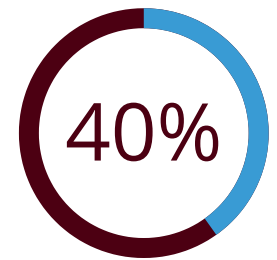
Responsibilities

- Build and maintain meaningful relationships between the provider and consumer
- Communicate and liaise between consumers and providers of agency to improve outcomes
- Enhance communication between consumers and other providers
- Anticipate or recognize problems in service delivery. Broker to prevent or resolve these problems
- Bridges gaps where there are problems in the transaction of cultural meaning
- Link and refer consumers to resources, supports, and other community services
- Mediate knowledge between different value systems or traditions, lay, popular, or professional traditions
- Translate and interpret information, instructions, and messages
- Develop educational materials to help consumers learn more about the agency and its functions
- Assess the values, beliefs, and practices related to health in the community being served
- Consult on implementing workforce diversity initiatives
- Address historical and inherent distrust that many racially, ethnically, and culturally diverse communities have toward state and federal institutions
- Promote and facilitate outreach from agency providers and partners
- Elicit and promote behavior change for both providers and consumers
- Identify, educate, and address bias, prejudice, and other institutional barriers that exist in service delivery settings
- Advocate for the consumer to ensure the delivery of effective services
- Promote awareness and understanding of the cultural factors of diverse communities, including how factors influence communities
- Promote the use of culturally and linguistically competent practices in the delivery of services
- Assist with efforts to increase access to services and eliminate racial and ethnic disparities
- Gather data and information that will assist with a better assessment of needs and provide more effective options for consumers

Staff Development Guide

Outcomes and staff tenure are directly influenced by staff development. Historically, the impetus has been on staff to enter employment skilled and prepared to work. This is a challenge for three important reasons. One, the research is moving quicker than trade schools, colleges and universities can keep up. Two, labor shortages in most sectors are increasing the likelihood that staff are coming in with more diverse backgrounds. Three, hiring for fit of the population served and organizational culture is often prioritized over skill set.

In order to formalize a development plan for cultural brokers, it will be important to interview cultural brokers representative of Colorado immigrant and refugee communities. The following includes what Brokers have indicated in interviews, as well as additions informed by equity, diversity, inclusion, and implementation practices.



Leave within the first year without vital training

Tool

- [Professional Development Quick Guide](#)



"Hire the heart, train the hand."

Author unknown

Staff Development Plan Components

Recruitment

- ☐ Onboarding
- ☐ Orientation
- ☐ Recurring training topics
- ☐ Surveys: evaluate facilitator effectiveness and learning gains via pre and post surveys

Retention

- ☐ Pulse surveys on broker professional development needs
- ☐ Performance management plans that include development goals
- ☐ Supervisor check-ins
- ☐ Observation and coaching

Topics for Brokers

- ☐ System navigation
- ☐ Advocacy
- ☐ Leadership
- ☐ Community building and development
- ☐ Mediation
- ☐ Communication
- ☐ Conflict management

Topics for All-Staff

- ☐ Motivational interviewing
- ☐ System navigation
- ☐ Client-centeredness
- ☐ Self-care
- ☐ Implicit bias
- ☐ Historical review of marginalizing practices experienced by community members
- ☐ Trauma Responsive care



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