

An Introduction to Cultural Competency and Document Creation

What is cultural competency?

Cultural competency is a set of behaviors, attitudes, and policies that enable a system, agency, or group of professionals to work effectively in cross-cultural situations. It includes the skills and knowledge you need to work with people from cultures other than your own.

A public health worker must take the values and beliefs of other cultures into account when working with clients. This applies to any sort of contact, including:

- designing written materials
- working with clients at your public health agency
- interacting with fellow employees



How do I make sure my documents are culturally appropriate?

Think about your audience.

- Who is your target audience?
- If you have pictures of people, are they reflective of your target audience?
 - For example, if you created brochures for a new diabetes program targeting African-American women, they should include pictures of African-American women.
- Have you taken cultural beliefs of the group into account?
 - Remember that “culture” has a very broad definition. It is the customary beliefs, social forms, and material traits of a racial, religious, or social group. It also relates to characteristic features of everyday life shared by people in a place or time. Consider how these people (who may represent certain audiences you’re trying to reach) are different culturally.

81-year-old retiree	Immigrant from Sudan	White American	Resident of Amish community
A native Bosnian speaker	African American	16-year-old high school student	A Hindu believer
A Muslim believer	A native Spanish speaker	Indian reservation resident	Immigrant from Canada

How do I know if my document is effective?

Test it. Your goal is to make your document client-centered, and the best way to accomplish this is through testing. Testing allows for direct feedback from your clients and includes the following methods:

- Focus groups
 - Informal discussions with 10 to 12 participants
 - Great for measuring reactions to design, pictures, logos, text
 - Not meant to test readability or comprehension
- Interviews
 - Best way to find out if document is readable
 - More private, which allows for comfort and invites frankness
 - Allows interviewer flexibility to ask follow up questions

Do not assume your target audience will understand your document. Ask if the document applies to their culture. Get feedback from the people for whom the document is for.

Don't have the resources to do testing? You can still test your document with limited resources. Consider writing your own questions and recruiting your clients. Try to select people who are comfortable with interviews and discussions. Scale down on the number of focus group participants or interviewees to save you time and resources.



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