Workbook 2.6  
**Person Centred Practice Across Cultures**

Valuing bilingual workers:

Practical strategies

July 2016

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**About National Disability Services**

**National Disability Services** is the peak body for non-government disability services. Its purpose is to promote quality service provision and life opportunities for people with disability. NDS’s Australia-wide membership includes more than 1000 non-government organisations, which support people with all forms of disability. NDS provides information and networking opportunities to its members and policy advice to state, territory and federal governments.

Table of Contents

1. Preface - Page 2

1.1 How to use this workbook? - Page 2

1.2 What is this workbook about? - Page 3

1.3 Outcomes - Page 3

1.4 Who is this workbook for? - Page 3

1.5 How long will it take to complete? - Page 3

2. The Workbook - Page 4

2.1 Introduction - Page 4

2.2 Who is a bilingual/bicultural worker? - Page 4

2.3 What are the benefits of workers with bilingual/bicultural skills for an organisation? - Page 5

2.4 Valuing bilingual workers: some quick tips - Page 7

2.5 How do you assess the language skills of bilingual workers? - Page 8

2.6 When NOT to use a bilingual worker - Page 8

2.7 What systems should be in place to support workers with bilingual/bicultural skills? - Page 9

3. Conclusion - Page 10

Preface

This workbook is part of a series of resources for the disability services sector designed by futures Upfront for NDS with funding provided by the NSW Department of Family and Community Services; Ageing, Disability and Home Care.

**1. Individual Practices – working with people from CALD backgrounds with disability**

1.1 Empathy – a practice to connect across cultures

1.2 Active listening – unconditional positive regard across cultures

1.3 Choice making – cross-cultural differences and what can we learn from them

1.4 Reflective Practice – why different points of view matter

1.5 Working effectively with interpreters

**2. Organisational Practices – building a culturally responsive organisation**

2.1 Terminology and data – a guide to understanding cultural diversity and disability

2.2 Making the business case – why diversity is good for business

2.3 A culturally responsive person centred organisation – key elements

2.4 Leading towards cultural responsiveness – a practical guide for managers, team leaders and coaches

2.5 Building a diverse workforce – practical strategies

2.6 Valuing bilingual workers – strategies to recruit, train and retain

**3. Community Engagement – working alongside diverse communities**

3.1 1 Community @ a time – culturally responsive community engagement principles and elements

3.2 Making Links – networking with CALD Communities

3.3 Cross-cultural story-based marketing – 1 story @a time

This workbook is part of “Organisational practices - building a culturally responsive organisation” series.

* 1. How to use this workbook?

This workbook can be used in many different ways, including:

* As a self-paced learning program by an individual
* As a self-paced learning program for a group
* As part of formal training organised by an organisation
* As part of coaching and mentoring.

This workbook includes exercises and opportunities for reflections (when working by yourself) or discussions (when working with others).

There is plenty of room in your workbook to take notes and make comments.

What is this workbook about?

This workbook provides the case for why utilising and valuing bilingual/bicultural workers makes good business sense. It will give you some tips and tools to get the most out of your bilingual/bicultural workforce.

Outcomes

At the end of the workbook you will:

* Better understand who are bilingual/ bicultural workers
* Understand the benefits of utilising the skills of bilingual bicultural workers
* Be able to apply some of the tips outlined in the workbook
* Put in place processes to support your bilingual/bicultural workforce

Who is this workbook for?

* People in an organisation responsible for strengthening the workforce
* Anyone interested in making their organisation more responsive to the people they support and the communities they work in
* People who are interested in building a diverse workforce.

How long will it take to complete?

This workbook will only take you 45 minutes to complete, including the short video. However, if you got through the tips at 2.7 it will take a while longer.

The Workbook

Introduction

The 2015 NDS Report, ‘*Everybody Counts: Why Language Services Matter*[[1]](#footnote-1) *’*, found that bilingual/bicultural workers:

* Are well connected in their communities
* Help build long term relationships with communities
* Aid communication and facilitate cross-cultural understanding
* Help break down barriers
* Engender trust and make people feel welcome.

Yet few organisations actively recruit, utilise or assess the bilingual skills of their workforce.

In **Workbook 2.2: Making the business case - why diversity is good for business**, we identified the benefits for organisations wishing to communicate and engage effectively with people from CALD communities with disability.

With organisations considering who their (potential) clients are, and identifying the best ways to provide support services for individuals, one consideration is how to assist people who do not speak English well or not at all. Under the NDIS, people with disability who do not speak English well or not at all may receive funding for interpreter services as part of their plan. The budget allocation however, may not cover interpreters in all situations. Organisations who can tap into their bilingual workforce will have a competitive edge in this market.

Who is a bilingual/bicultural worker?

**Bilingual/bicultural workers** are referred to as those workers whose linguistic/cultural skills are a core component, or essential skill of their position.

There are also **workers who have bilingual/bicultural skills**, but those skills are skills are an ‘added’ bonus. Their bilingual/bicultural skills are not part of the core component, nor essential criteria of their position.

In this workbook we are focusing on the value that all workers with bilingual /bicultural skills bring to an organisation.

Reflections:

Do you know how many of your workers speak a language other than English?

Do you know what languages other than English are spoken by your workers?

Do you know how many of the workers who speak a language other than English would like to use that skill at work?

Do you know how skilled each worker is in the languages other than English they speak?

What are the benefits of workers with bilingual /bicultural skills for an organisation?

Workers with bilingual/bicultural skills bring many benefits to an organisation as a direct consequence of their language skills and cultural knowledge. They:

* Aid communication and facilitate cross-cultural understanding
* Help break down barriers
* Engender trust and make people feel welcome

In addition, they may:

* Be well connected in their communities: workers with bilingual/bicultural skills can be a wealth of knowledge and information about their communities and are often well placed to support an organisation to engage and network.
* Increase access by people from CALD with disability from the same background - workers who are trusted by communities can provide pathways for people to access services.
* Help build long-term relationships with communities. They have a greater understanding of issues within communities, and how to navigate these sensitively.
* Bring different perspectives and creative ideas to solving problems
* Support other workers to better understand cultural differences when working with a person from CALD with disability
* Expand the diversity of the workplace.

Video: [**A Peacock in the land of Penguins**](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hNeR4bBUj68)  
This is a great short video that highlights the benefits of diversity.

**Reflections:**   
What value does having workers with bilingual/bicultural skills bring to your organisation?

Valuing bilingual workers: some quick tips

To get the most out of your bilingual/bicultural workforce consider the following suggestions:

|  | Quick tips |
| --- | --- |
| 1 | You can begin by doing a language audit to identify workers that speak a language other than English. You might do this as an online survey (survey monkey works well) or you may already collect this information about your workers. |
| 2 | Consider collecting the following information:  Country of Birth  Ethnicity   * Main language other than English spoken at home * Willingness to use bilingual/ bicultural skills at work * Areas of interests, activities, or skills |
| 3 | 1. Collate responses and compare to local area demographics and to your client profile (Workbook 3.2: Making Links - networking with CALD Communities, outlines how to access demographic data) |
| 4 | 1. Use this information for the basis of developing a language skills/ cultural knowledge register, and compile. |
| 5 | 1. Determine how you are going to assess the bilingual and bicultural skills of those workers who expressed an interest on using them in the workplace (see 2.5 below). |
| 6 | 1. Consider remuneration options |
| 7 | 1. Develop a policy. You may need to review all your communication and language services policies to ensure they reflect the role of bilingual workers (see 2.6 below) |
| 8 | 1. Consider developing a bilingual worker job description or review existing job descriptions to include language skills |
| 9 | 1. Review your recruitment practices: Actively encourage people with bilingual/bicultural skills to apply for positions |
| 10 | 1. Provide training to bilingual workers so that they understand their specific responsibilities |
| 11 | 1. Provide training to all workers about the roles and responsibilities of bilingual/bicultural workers |
| 12 | Promote the language skills/ cultural knowledge register across the organisation, to the people you support, and to the communities you work in. |
| 13 | Develop a system for recording the occasions of use of the language skills of workers |
| 14 | Monitor and review the effectiveness of the strategy |
| 15 | When developing engagement strategies for working with specific CALD communities talk to your workers from the same cultural / linguistic background with bilingual/bicultural skills first. Find out what they know about their communities and what tips they can give you for engagement. Include them in any engagement strategies. |

Applying the above tips will actively demonstrate the value you place on your bilingual /bicultural workforce and help you get the most out of them.

How do you assess the language skills of bilingual workers?

The National Authority of Accreditation of Translators and Interpreters (NAATI) can provide formal assessment of the language skills of your workers. You can access NAATI’s 2015-16 Fees and Charges Schedule [online](https://www.naati.com.au/media/1079/fees-and-charges.pdf).

Some organisations choose less formal approaches to assess the language skills of their workers. For example, the Transcultural Mental Health Centre (TCMHC), have developed a number of informal processes to assess the bilingual skills of their workers. These include:

* Getting feedback from the person/s supported by the worker.
* Using a ‘language expert’ on interview panels
* Buddying new workers with established bilingual workers who can assess their language skills ‘on the job’
* Assessing the quality of bilingual resources developed.

When NOT to use a bilingual worker

It is however important to remember that workers with bilingual skills cannot replace professional interpreters in all situations. Professional interpreters should always be used in situations:

* when you are seeking formal consent
* that are complex
* where you are communicating information that is legally binding or
* that put at risk either the organisation or the person.  
    
  For more information about when to use a bilingual worker go to Workbook 1.5 Working Effectively with Interpreters.

What systems should be in place to support workers with bilingual/bicultural skills?

Consider developing policy around the use of bilingual /bicultural workers for the organisation. Some considerations for inclusion:

* Definitions and roles (e.g. workers with bilingual/ bicultural skills; bilingual/bicultural workers, , professional interpreter)
* Embedding language competency as a core skill into job descriptions
* How will you assess language skills?
* How will you keep a record of the language skills of workers (will you set up a database?
* Protocols on using the workers bilingual skills
* Guidelines for identifying which situations to use a bilingual worker and when to use a professional interpreter
* How to renumerate someone for use of their language skills
* How to match workers to the people supported.

Ensure that any policies and procedures you develop are integrated into the broader organisational context and embedded into your continuous improvement processes.

Ideally policies and procedures in relation to the use of bilingual workers should be part of an overall communications strategy that addresses related multilingual communication issues such as the use of professional interpreters and translation services.

Conclusion

Workers with bilingual/bicultural skills are a valuable resource for every organisation. This workbook aimed to assist you by giving you some tips and considerations for demonstrating the value that workers with bilingual/bicultural skills bring to the organisation.

You may also want to have a look at Workbooks 2.5 Building a diverse workforce and 3.2 Making Links.  
  
**Reflection:**

What are some of the take away messages from this workbook? Are there things you disagree with? Was there something that surprised you?

1. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)