

Guidelines for Being a Cultural Broker

Superbloom guidelines to cultural brokering

1. Ask the community member if they would like a cultural broker. Do not assume everyone needs or wants one by default.
2. Ask the community member if they would like us there as a witness, as a translator of concepts, as a facilitator, and/or for conflict intervention.
 1. Confirm in advance whether the community member would like you to check in with them in the backchannel before intervening, or they allow to use your judgment on when to intervene.
3. Ask the community member what backchannel communication (e.g., Slack, Signal) they would like to use if they need assistance during the interview.
4. Listen, observe, and take notes during the interview.
5. Debrief with the community member after the interview for any feedback about the experience.

What is cultural brokering?

Cultural brokering is the act of bridging, linking, or mediating between groups or persons of different cultural backgrounds for the purpose of reducing conflict or producing change (Jezewski, 1990). A cultural broker is defined as a go-between, one who advocates on behalf of another individual or group (Jezewski & Sotnik, 2001). In the 1960s, researchers began to use the concept of cultural brokers within the context of healthcare delivery to diverse communities.

Who is a cultural broker?

Cultural brokers serve as intermediaries at the most basic level bridging the cultural gap by communicating differences and similarities between cultures. They may also serve in more sophisticated roles mediating and negotiating complex processes with organizations, government, communities, and between interest groups.

Cultural brokers are liaisons, cultural guides, mediators, and catalysts for change.

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; and
- advocate for the underrepresented person, to ensure the delivery of effective services.

What is needed to be a cultural broker?

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 practices of cultural groups;
- within diverse communities; and
- experience navigating complex systems within communities.

Awareness. Cultural brokers are aware of (1) their own cultural identity, (2) the cultural identity of the members of diverse communities, and (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 challenges and well-being of cultural groups; (2) networks within diverse communities; and (3) technical and/or research systems and practices.

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 underrepresented people, (5) negotiate complex systems, and (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.

How have cultural brokers been liaisons, cultural guides, mediators, and catalysts for change within health care?

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

Cultural brokers may serve as guides for health care settings that are in the process of incorporating culturally and linguistically competent principles, values, and practices. They not

only understand the strengths and needs of the community, but also are cognizant of the structures and functions of the health care setting. These cultural brokers can assist in developing educational materials that will help patients/consumers to learn more about the health care setting and its 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 members 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 health care setting to provide support for community development.

Cultural brokers can help to ease the historical and inherent distrust that many racially, ethnically, and culturally diverse communities have toward health care organizations. 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 patient/consumer. Cultural brokers employ these skills and promote increased use of health care services within their respective communities.

Cultural brokers often can bridge this chasm of distrust that many cultural communities have toward 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 health.

In many ways, cultural brokers are change agents because they can initiate transformation of a health care setting by creating an inclusive and collaborative environment for providers and patients/consumers alike. They model and mentor behavioral change, which can break down bias, prejudice, and other institutional barriers that exist in health care settings. They work toward changing intergroup and interpersonal relationships, so that the organization can build capacity from within to adapt to the changing needs of the communities they serve.

References:

https://nccc.georgetown.edu/culturalbroker/2_role/index.html

https://nccc.georgetown.edu/culturalbroker/Cultural_Broker_EN.pdf