

# Working Together



# WORKING TOGETHER

This is a guide for employers and bi-cultural workers (BCWs), working together, to support BCWs navigate the complexity of living and working in their communities.

These recommendations were developed in response to a focus group with eighteen BCWs and findings from a literature review conducted by cohealth, both exploring the research question;

**How can organisations employing bi-cultural workers better support them to navigate the complexity of living and working in their communities, specifically in relation to self-care, boundary setting and role creep?**

**Recommendations should be considered in connection to the following points.**

## Collaboration

Closer collaboration between employers and BCWs is needed to negotiate the complexities of living and working in one's community

## Community

BCWs generally have pre-existing relationships with their community members and cultural obligations making boundary setting complex

## Objectives

Projects that employ BCWs often have their objectives set by funders or policy makers prior to BCW engagement, in these instances;

- Project objectives may not align with community interest/needs
- Projects may seek to explore topics that are culturally or religiously sensitive
- BCWs may be stereotyped or ostracised (in both personal and professional life) for supporting projects not seen positively by their community

## Funding

Funding availability and duration will dictate employment of BCWs, length of community engagement and project sustainability.

- Poor resourcing and short-term engagements can make it difficult for BCWs to build and maintain trust
- BCWs reputation can be negatively impacted if projects are rushed, under resourced or fail to respond to community requests for support (in both personal and professional life).

# VOLUNTEERISM

Cultural expertise and lived experience are essential ingredients needed to ensure services and programs delivered to diverse communities are accessible, responsive to community interest/needs and are culturally appropriate.

Whilst most organisations recognise the importance of engaging community perspectives, they generally rely on altruism and voluntary participation of community members to gain these insights. Thus, there is a culture of volunteerism; whereby individuals and groups are frequently asked to share their cultural expertise or lived experience voluntarily or in exchange for gift cards and catering.

This project consulted with various bi-cultural workers and community leaders, and found that **an overwhelming number of community members felt that constant volunteerism leads to burn out and resentment.**

Additionally, it was felt that **volunteerism can perpetuate power imbalances** whereby western perspectives are privileged and remunerated and non-western cultural perspectives are seen as secondary and not worthy of remuneration.

It was a recommended outcome of the project that organisations should be encouraged to **implement policies and procedures that support employment pathways for cultural experts and bi-cultural workers** that may lead to sustainable employment and remuneration.



# EXPENSES

Whilst it is recommended that employers seek to create ongoing, secure employment opportunities for bi-cultural workers and take active steps to challenge casualisation of the workforce, cohealth recognises that the majority of bi-cultural workers are employed as consultants or on a casual/part time basis.



When setting budgets for projects or costs associated with bi-cultural work consider the following:

Payment for professional services NOT honorariums or gift cards	Flexible working hours to accommodate community needs – may incur after hours or weekend rates
A minimum of 3 hours payment for any booking	Funds for professional development
Paid travel time and travel expenses	Payment for supervision
Paid preparation time to read relevant materials, prepare for group work etc.	Payment for orientation and reading organisation policy/ induction materials
A clear cancellation policy; Less than 24 hours cancelation paid in full. Less than 48hours cancelation paid 50%.	Paid participation in team meetings and induction processes
Cover personal expenses including; use of personal cars, laptops, phones, credit etc	Provision of work phone, laptop, cars, emails (where possible)
Payment for follow up phone calls, referrals or emails post community engagement	

# CAPACITY BUILDING AND PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Bi-cultural workers have highlighted that there are limited capacity building opportunities and professional development pathways for their career progression. This is compounded by the casual nature of their employment and the prioritisation of academic qualification over cultural expertise or lived experience (VRHN. 2016. Talking about health report).

It was a recommended outcome of the project that organisations should seek opportunities to provide professional development and capacity building for people in bi-cultural worker roles.

Bi-cultural workers should also be supported by systems and processes that enable them to complete their responsibilities, for example;

Orientation to an organisation is essential, regardless of whether a bi-cultural worker is casual or ongoing.

Bi-cultural workers have many transferable skills and may wish to work in different roles across the organisation – this should be supported.

Professional development opportunities should be provided regardless of whether a bi-cultural worker is casual or ongoing.

Preparation materials should be provided with sufficient time to prepare (a minimum of one week is advisable).

Career progression or diversification can be supported by the provision of mentoring, internships or placements.

For projects where specialised knowledge is required, bi-cultural workers should be offered capacity building on this topic.

## Role Creep

The expansion of a person's role beyond their normal duties, including; requests for support from community, employers and/or colleagues seeking assistance.

Ensure BCWs have clear position descriptions outlining expected outcomes and scope.

Understand the complexities of living and working in one's community specifically how this results in additional requests for support, cultural obligation and shared personal spaces.

Limit organisational requests for BCWs to provide "community perspective" outside of their role.

Create opportunities for career progression and increased pay as BCW role becomes more complex.

Provide scope and resources for BCWs role to grow in response to community requests/needs if desired.

Consult BCWs about their capacity and expertise – don't assume they have relevant experience, networks or capacity to do all tasks.

Create supportive team environments where BCWs can delegate work to their colleagues when needed.

Inform your employer when more time is needed for a task and negotiate adequate resourcing



## Supporting Self Care

Taking an active role in protecting one's own well-being and happiness, particularly during periods of stress.

**Co-design, co-design, co-design – this will ensure BCWs are delivering work that is culturally safe and achievable.**

**Provide regular, paid, supervision and identify early signs of BCW burnout.**

**Facilitate BCW confidence and safety to discuss work challenges and reassure them that raising issues/ challenges will not affect their employment.**

**Support BCWs to network and collaborate with organisations and peers for ideas exchange and increased support.**

**Understand that organisations generally operate under western norms and world views.**

**Embrace BCWs non-western ways of knowing and work collaboratively to embed them in practice.**

**Ensure all staff have received cultural competency training to support a culturally safe work environment.**

**Recognise and celebrate the work of BCWs (events, awards etc).**

**Integrate BCWs into teams to enable collegial support, incidental learning and belonging.**

**Provide capacity building on; recognising the early signs of burnout, trauma-informed care etc.**

**Provide opportunities for self-care at work for example; yoga, relaxation activities.**

**Ensure BCWs can access EAP that are culturally safe and understand the complexities of BCW.**



## Self Care Tips for bi-cultural workers

Inform your manager when you experience challenges at work especially if it is affecting your wellbeing.

Speak up when you feel your employers/communities' expectations are unreasonable.

Speak up when what you are being asked to do is not culturally appropriate for your community.

Attend regular supervision with your manager/peers to reflect on your work, identify support needs and problem solve.

Regular networking with colleagues and peers for support and reflective practice.

Take advantage of available training, build capacity and work more effectively.

Do not take work home with you – switch off and come back to it tomorrow.

Take regular time off from work/community to rest and come back refreshed.

Access EAP for additional support if needed.

Know your limits – you can't help everyone with everything.

Own your limitations – tell people when you don't know how to do something.

Be kind to yourself.

Remember frustration or anger toward your organisation/ service is not a reflection on you.





## Boundary Setting

The act of setting limits with oneself, their community and employers about what they will/will not do, based on; the scope of their role, capacity and willingness to do the task requested.



Ensure BCWs have a good understanding of their roles and responsibilities (including, what is NOT their responsibility).

Clearly communicate organisational policy regarding community engagement.

Provide BCWs with work a phone and email.

Organisations can draw upon their power/privilege to help articulate BCW roles, limitations and project scope with target communities.

Remember BCWs cannot represent the entire community.

BCWs are not interpreters and should not be used as such.

## Boundary Setting tips for bi-cultural workers

Clearly articulate your communities' expectations to your employer and negotiate how to respond.

Clearly explain your role to the community members, including what you can and cannot do – do this at initial engagement.

Inform your employer of the personal ramifications you will face if you cannot respond to community requests.

Explain office hours, policies and procedures to the community and use these as a tool to draw boundaries "I'm sorry I am not allowed to give you my personal number".

Refer community members to appropriate services/colleagues where request for support is outside the scope of your role.

Speak up when what you are being asked to do is not culturally appropriate for your community.

Learn ways to respectfully say no.

Have resources/pamphlets in language to support referral processes and encourage community members to self-refer.

Know your position description and draw boundaries with your employer/colleagues when you are being asked to do things outside of your role.

If possible, have a work phone/ email which is switched off when not working.

Maintain boundaries – Remember, you can't help everyone with everything all the time!

Inform your employer of your cultural obligations.

In the event of being contacted outside working hours or days, politely explain that you will be able to support when you are back at work.

Use the power/legitimacy of managers to draw boundaries/ explain roles, take fault.



# CULTURAL SAFETY



Western organisations generally exist in postcolonial contexts that prioritise western ways of knowing, systems and structures. This can disadvantage people from non-western backgrounds and perpetuate unequal power dynamics.

This context coupled with unconscious bias, prejudice, ignorance or discrimination can contribute to an unsafe work environment for bi-cultural staff.

**Recommendations to support cultural safety in the workplace were developed by cohealth's bi-cultural project, they include**



Deliver Cultural safety training across the whole organisation.



Teach Australian workplace expectations during the orientation process.



Practice self-reflection; acknowledge that unconscious bias, beliefs and assumptions influence how we work.



Embrace different world views, ways of knowing, thinking and doing.



Encourage people to use language that identifies when something is a subjective experience or belief.



Build trust and relationships among participants that allows them to feel safe in challenging each other and expressing their needs.



Recognise how power, privilege or disadvantage influences people's decision making and outcomes.



Zero tolerance for racism and culture-based bullying.



Ask your staff/colleagues what best suits them. Learning and ways of gaining knowledge are intrinsically cultural and laden with norms and expectations.



Respect a person's lived experience. Bi-cultural workers know their community and their needs.



Respect cultural norms and protocols. Social, gender and age norms will influence the expectations and experiences of community engagement.



Offer flexible working arrangements to allow for prayer times and other cultural/religious practices.



Challenge paternalism; commit to sharing power. Step back and let communities take the lead. Prioritise their voices, interests and needs - Be advocates for this!



Everyone's knowledge and skills are valued.



Be creative and flexible! things change and grow to respond to communities' needs.



Bi-cultural staff may feel isolated due to a lack of diversity in the organisation - encourage the establishment of networks or buddy systems to support people of colour in the workplace.



Diversify your workforce at all levels; prioritise cultural expertise and lived experience.



