

Ensuring Cultural and Linguistic Competence In Meeting Planning and Activities

AUCD 2013

When planning a meeting, there are several aspects to keep in mind to ensure the activity fully takes into consideration potential cultural and linguistic differences of attendees and participants.

The following guidelines are not intended to be either requirements or a checklist that guarantees an event or activity is fully welcoming and appropriate to attendees of all backgrounds. Rather, we hope that this document will serve as a point of reference and stimulate careful consideration for anyone planning an event or activity of any size.

Programmatic

This session refers to the planning that takes place before an event.

Planning Committees

- Convene a planning committee whose membership represents diverse perspectives of the organizations sponsoring and coordinating the meeting, and the intended audience including the meaningful participation of individuals with disabilities and their families.
- Ensure that the planning committee is representative of the racial, ethnic, and cultural backgrounds in the U.S., its territories, and tribal communities or the geographic locale in which the meeting will be held.
- Determine the goal(s) for integrating culturally or linguistically competent content into meetings and conferences, which may include but are not limited to:
 - raising awareness of cultural and linguistic competence
 - increasing understanding and knowledge of cultural and linguistic

competence related to such areas as training, technical assistance, research, community services, community engagement, information dissemination, and legislation

- developing skill sets that apply knowledge of cultural and linguistic competence to: (1) the disparities, disproportionality, and inequities experienced by individuals with disabilities; (2) organizational and individual change frameworks; and (3) engaging diverse communities to both embrace and advocate with and on behalf of people with disabilities and their families.

Content

- Determine strategies for integrating principles, content, and themes related to cultural or linguistic competence that may include:
 - plenary sessions that can raise the awareness of the entire meeting or conference audience
 - individual sessions, panel presentations, symposia, interest groups, and round table discussions to increase knowledge and understanding of meeting or conference participants
 - formats that allow for extensive time frames to develop skills sets including pre-meeting or conference workshops, special meetings, conference tracks, or entire meetings or conferences
 - activities that promote peer technical assistance, self-directed and interactive learning experiences, and opportunities for casual exchange

Evaluation

- Plan multiple strategies to evaluate the degree to which the meeting or conference infused principles, content, and themes related to cultural and linguistic competence. This may include using:
 - bulletin boards, easels, and post-it notes in the conference venue
 - tweets, posts, or other social media
 - small group debriefing of participants
 - formal and informal on-site or post-meeting evaluations with speakers, exhibitors, and others
 - on-site and follow-up surveys and evaluations via e-mail with conference attendees
- Participant evaluations may include questions that ask:
 - Was the incorporation of culturally and linguistically competent material in plenaries, sessions, workshops and other conference-wide sessions apparent?
 - Did speakers follow guidelines for ensuring meaningful participation by all in their presentations?
 - Did exhibitors display materials that spoke to a diverse audience or consumers?
 - What can we do better to ensure culturally and linguistically competent materials, presentations and supports for future meetings?

- Speaker and exhibitor evaluations may include questions that ask:
 - Did you consider the guidelines provided for ensuring culturally and linguistically competent presentations and materials when developing your presentation or exhibit for the conference?
 - If so did you find them helpful?
 - Did you have any specific feedback from participants on the need for these types of considerations?
 - What can we do better to support the inclusion of culturally and linguistically competent supports for future meetings?

Products

This section discusses some of the many types of products that might be produced in conjunction with a meeting or event, regardless of their means of dissemination.

Types of Products

- Print
 - overall meeting/conference program
 - session program(s), e.g.: awards and poster session
 - posters
 - meeting signage, including directional, sponsor, and session signs
 - floor plans or maps
 - event tickets
 - participant or speaker lists
 - job or recognition boards
 - session scripts
 - session handouts (while many speakers may provide their own session handouts, event planners can provide guidelines to ensure cultural and linguistic appropriateness)
 - invitations
 - press releases
- Media/Electronic
 - calls for submissions
 - awards
 - sponsorship recruitment
 - follow-up materials, including thank you letters, event surveys, future save-the-dates
 - the event website
 - promotional or summary videos and photos
 - slide shows or PowerPoints
 - session information (topics, speakers, description) in online program
 - session scheduling
 - event branding
 - an event app

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- Social Media
 - messaging posts on sites such as Twitter or Facebook
 - photo sharing on Instagram or other social photo sites
- Other
 - tchotchkes
 - awards
 - name badges and holders
 - special exhibits

Product Content

- Review content to be sure it matches the expected event audience
- Revise the language and imaging if it is not inclusive of diverse attendee backgrounds, whether cultural, linguistic, ability, or other
- Review the AUCD Considerations for Culturally and Linguistically Competent Presentations and Guidelines for Achieving Cultural and Linguistic Competency in Information Dissemination Activities, and share with speakers as appropriate
- Be sure product content remains relevant to both the purpose of the event and to that of diversity, so that they blend harmoniously and one does not take away focus from the other.

Image and Graphics

- Use images that reflect diversity (race, ethnicity, disability), but do so in a “natural” manner, so it doesn’t look like diversity is forced and unusual or unnatural.
- If multiple images are used, then different aspects of diversity might be showcased separately.
- If graphics are used, be mindful of possibly offensive signs/images to any group of attendees.
- Make sure images and graphics remain relevant to the event purpose and convey both the meeting message as well as the themes of diversity and inclusion.

Note for Videos

- If videos are created for or around the event, make sure they are meaningful and engaging to different audiences.
- Consider alternate formats and languages based on the expected audience.
- Consider captioning all videos.
- Pay special attention to “special effects” that can be disturbing to people with disabilities.

Product Formats

- Make sure that different product formats are available so that all audiences can be reached, such as using print and electronic means.
- Depending on the anticipated audience, consider translating at least a portion of the materials into alternate languages.
- Think accessibility, both in language and reading level, and in available formats.
- While it may not always be feasible to offer alternate formats automatically, provide attendees with the option to request one in advance. Make sure that alternate formats do not miss out on inclusive perspectives and diversity even if they are more concise than the original format.
- For electronic versions, make sure they're 508 compliant, i.e. accessible to screen readers.

Resources

- [http://nccc.georgetown.edu/](http://nccc.georgetown.edu/documents/planners_guide.pdf)
- [documents/planners_guide.pdf](http://nccc.georgetown.edu/documents/planners_guide.pdf)

Product Dissemination

- Print and online methods are the most common forms of event product dissemination.
- For diverse audiences with possibly different needs and expectations, not only the format but also the timing is important. Consider disseminating certain materials early, particularly if some attendees need or request the extra time to absorb information or translate it.
- Reviewing materials early and getting a better understanding of the meeting in advance can help attendees prepare for their participation and make it an even more meaningful experience.

Review

- Make sure that the planning committee reviews at least some of the materials to be sure that the content is aligned with their vision and is welcoming to and appropriate for all potential attendees.
- While follow-up materials may seem less important, be sure that they are reviewed also, because they will help engage the audience for the following year, and get an early start on promoting future meetings/conferences. Ensuring these materials are welcoming to a diverse audience may increase interest and attendance.

Logistics

This section describes some of the details that go into ensuring a well-coordinated and produced event.

Planning

- Select date of conference that does not conflict with cultural or religious holidays
- Organize a planning committee whose membership represents diverse backgrounds
- Highlight the culture of the meeting location by providing attendees with an opportunity to further develop their knowledge, skills, and awareness as it relates to cultural issues and working with diverse populations
- Identify how cultural and linguistic competence relates to the roles of attendees

Presenters and Speakers

- Choose speakers with expertise in the particular topic to be addressed who represent culturally and ethnically diverse populations or backgrounds
- Request that speakers review the Considerations for Culturally and Linguistically Competent Presentations and plan their presentation accordingly

Materials and Handouts

- Consider how graphics, pictures, decorations, visual aids, and displays might be perceived by culturally diverse groups
- See the above “products” section for additional guidance on ensuring event materials are appropriate to people of diverse backgrounds

Accessibility and Accommodations

- Ask attendees for individual accessibility needs that will ensure their full participation at the meeting
- Consider the overall meeting climate of the hotel, décor, menu, and entertainment and how each might be perceived by people of diverse
- Consider the economic impact of attending the conference for some attendees backgrounds and abilities
- Ensure full physical accessibility by planning for wider aisles and meeting spaces that have an adequate number of accessible guest rooms and rest rooms.

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