

Cultural Considerations

California is home to diverse cultural and ethnic communities. This makes it especially important to know your audience, their concerns, needs and values, and to develop tobacco education materials that speak to the community. Creating culturally sensitive materials means developing materials that not only avoid stereotypes but also fit the cultural and behavioral needs of the community.

IN THIS GUIDE YOU WILL LEARN TO:

- Understand how and why to learn about a community's culture.
- Become aware of how tobacco is used in a community.
- Use language and images that match a community's beliefs and attitudes.

Learn about the Community's Culture

Learn all you can about the community and its culture. Develop sensitivity about what words, colors, statements or beliefs are culturally charged and should be avoided.

Elements to look for in a community's culture include:

- Ages
- Gender
- Ethnicity
- Geography
- Education
- Sexual orientation
- Economics and finances
- Religious and spiritual beliefs
- Community identity
- Creative, physical, and artistic expressions
- Value systems
- Communication and learning styles
- Community class system
- Rituals and symbols

To educate yourself about the culture, you can:

- Read community magazines, newspapers, books, and literature
- Watch and listen to TV and radio shows and advertisements
- Attend community functions, celebrations, sports and music events
- Learn about the arts, dance, and means of community expression
- Pay attention to gender roles, interactions between age groups, and family roles

- Learn what stereotypes, images, words, or statements are not acceptable
- Open a dialogue with community leaders and trend setters
- Encourage the community to contribute ideas and suggestions

Learn the Role Tobacco Plays in the Community

Tobacco can play a variety of roles in the community. It may:

- Be a part of adolescent behavior or peer pressure
- Play a sacred role in ceremonies
- Be used medicinally or for healing
- Be used differently by youth, men or women
- Be used by a particular group or membership

Find out:

- Do family members regularly smoke around children or other family members?
- What effect does tobacco have on illness and death in the community?
- How does the target population view disease and death?
- What do community members already know about tobacco?
- What do community members want to accomplish or learn in regards to tobacco?

Honor Culture and Beliefs

Match language, learning styles and experience of your target audience

Cultures differ in their values and perceptions in how they learn and what works to change behaviors. Match what you write to the community's cultural norms and attitudes. Include language and vocabulary that is familiar and used in its normal context, or explain new words or new phrases. Draw on behavioral norms and experiences such as family activities by orienting information around positive examples or community events. Make sure the sequence of information and the way it is presented matches cultural logic and the way information is processed and learned. While you may think people might want to stop smoking for health reasons, they may want to stop because it hurts their families, or because it is no longer an acceptable social custom.

Avoid stereotypes and cultural taboos

While developing materials we all know to avoid racial and ethnic stereotypes, but you will also need to be aware of words or phrases that are culturally charged and symbols or images that may be acceptable to one culture but not another. As an example, the Chinese consider red to be good luck, but a card written in red ink is associated with

ending a relationship, and white, red or black gifts are linked with a funeral. The Japanese consider white to be associated with death, but other cultures consider white to be a symbol of purity. Make sure that community members pretest or field test your materials to prevent these mistakes.

Use positive cultural images

Always use images and examples that present a culture in positive ways. This provides strong behavioral models that help emphasize your message. Displaying negative images may inadvertently reinforce the behaviors you want the community to avoid. For example, showing someone smoking may trigger a desire to smoke or could make it look appealing. If you must use a negative image, make sure that it is an object such as a burning cigarette with an X through it and not a person or community symbol. It is better to use positive pictures and examples to model behaviors to community members.

Involve the community

Keep an open dialog and communicate with your target population. Ask them for their opinions and feedback. Show them initial drafts and ask if the language and wording is effective and culturally appropriate. Involve the target audience as much as possible and rely on their opinions and beliefs to create material that addresses their needs and behavioral styles.

Cultural Considerations

Before you start to work with a different community and culture, it is good to recognize your own beliefs, attitudes and customs, particularly about tobacco. As you realize that your perspectives are formed by your own education, background and culture, you become conscious that not everyone thinks and reacts the same. This knowledge helps you develop sensitivity so you can be open and responsive to the culture of your target audience.

Cultural Competency Resources

Speaking of Health: Assessing Health Communication Strategies for Diverse Populations

This book looks at the challenges of delivering health messages to different audiences and examines the ways in which messages must be adapted to the unique information needs of their diverse audiences. <http://www.nap.edu/books/0309072719/html>

National Center for Cultural Competence

A Web site that discusses the need for cultural competency and includes a resource database, self-assessment tools and a "Planner's Guide" for conference planners. <http://www.georgetown.edu/research/gucdc/nccc/index.html>