

Recruiting bilingual staff



This information sheet is one of a series produced by the Centre for Culture Ethnicity & Health (CEH) covering aspects of language services. It aims to enhance language services planning and practice for staff working with people with limited English proficiency.

This information sheet is a guide to recruiting people who can perform their work duties in English and another language. Developing the most appropriate recruitment approach for your organisation will be influenced by whether you are recruiting primarily for a position that works with a specific community in a language other than English (LOTE) or for a position where the LOTE is an additional skill.

Policy context

Victorian Government language services policy recognises bilingual staff – along with interpreters and translations – as a valuable part of an agency's language services response to people with limited English proficiency.

Can I recruit people for their abilities in a language other than English?

Yes. Language is like any other skill that can be acquired and developed. An employer needs to decide how important this skill is for the work required.

Furthermore, the Victorian *Equal Opportunity Act 2010* Section 22 states that "an employer may limit the offering of employment to people with a particular attribute in relation to the provision of services for people with the same attribute if those services ... can be provided most effectively by people with that attribute".

Advertising for bilingual staff

Once the position description has been finalised (advice on undertaking this can be found in the CEH Bilingual Staff Research Project report and the CEH language services tip sheet *Managing bilingual staff*), it is important to develop a targeted promotion strategy to ensure you attract the most suitable applicants. Possible considerations include:

Preparing advertisements

Some suggestions for wording that may be used in advertising for bilingual staff in mainstream media include:

- Persons who speak XYZ language are encouraged to apply.
- The ability to speak XYZ language as well as English is desirable / essential.
- Bilingual applicants are encouraged to apply.

Identify the types of language skills required

for the role, such as speaking, listening, writing and/or reading. Also consider including a statement that your organisation is an equal opportunity employer.

Mainstream media

If the position requires a high level of English language proficiency and literacy, conventional means of advertising could be used. You may consider presenting the advertisement in the required LOTE to attract the attention of speakers of the language.

Ethnic media

Many ethnic communities have their own media networks, which can include newspapers, email, radio, television programs and the internet.

Word-of-mouth

In some communities, the most effective way to reach potential applicants (especially in smaller and newly emerging communities) is through word-of-mouth. This can be done through attending

information sessions and community events, and visiting community organisations.

Existing networks and key institutions

Consider using organisations that engage with people from the relevant communities to assist you to promote the vacant position, such as the Adult Multicultural Education Service (AMES), English language schools, TAFE English as a second language departments, migrant resource centres, ethno-specific organisations and religious institutions. You can also advertise in school newsletters and community information bulletins, or through informal networks and other organisations.

The job application and interview process

The conventional job application and interview processes may be unfamiliar to people who have experienced different work cultures. Strategies to ensure such applicants have the opportunity to present effectively include providing applicants with guidelines covering how to prepare a resume, address key selection criteria and fill in an application, and information about what to expect from an interview.

Consider conducting an information session for potential candidates to:

- Assist applicants to better understand the position and the organisation
- Enable the organisation to meet potential applicants and learn about the pool of applicants
- Assist applicants to prepare a written application, if one is required.

For certain roles, you could be flexible in how applicants can respond to the advertisement and consider an alternative to written applications, such as a verbal application.

Conducting the interview

Different cultural communication styles can influence the capacity of an applicant to respond during an interview. Consider consulting with somebody from the same community about the structure of the interview and the type of questions.

Assessing language skills

It is important to conduct a language assessment of the applicant's LOTE and/or English skills. Before doing this, decide which language skills you need to assess. To assess language capacity, consider including a person that speaks the same language on the panel.

Supporting your new bilingual employee

All new staff members require support to settle into their new position. When recruiting for LOTE skills, consider there may need to be additional support for English language proficiency and literacy, and a period of acculturation to an Australian workplace.



Information sheets in the CEH language services series

INTERPRETATION

1. Interpreters: an introduction
2. Assessing the need for an interpreter
3. Booking and briefing an interpreter
4. Communicating via an interpreter
5. Debriefing with an interpreter

TRANSLATION

6. Translation: an introduction
7. Planning for translation

BILINGUAL STAFF

8. Recruiting bilingual staff
9. Managing bilingual staff

ORGANISATIONAL RESPONSE

10. Developing a comprehensive language services response

© Centre for Culture, Ethnicity and Health, 2014.

(03) 9418 9929
enquiries@ceh.org.au
www.ceh.org.au

