



## Developing and Testing Messages for Cultural and Linguistic Competence

It is important to remember that your perception of the messages you develop might not be the same as your audience's. While you want them to understand and respond to the information you provide, they are first listening to hear that 1) you respect them, 2) their needs have been considered, and 3) they are included in emergency plans.

Linguistic and cultural competence means understanding the most effective ways to convey information to members of diverse populations. Often the main form of communicating public health information is through written materials, such as brochures, newsletters, and flyers. If you are trying to reach a population or community with limited English proficiency, then materials might need to be translated into that community's native language or presented visually in a picture format. Also consider that for those who are not literate in their native language, these written materials will not be effective, and recorded audio messages might be more appropriate.

Consider the cultural relevancy of photographs, images, and other visual features when creating messages and materials.

You might need to consider the reading and comprehension level of your intended audience and use simple sentences, plain language, and avoid technical and medical terms. Most successful communications to the general public are produced at a sixth grade reading level. Studies show that even sophisticated readers are subjected to so much information in a day that they now require this level of simplicity for full comprehension, particularly during emergencies.

After you have worked with the community to develop sample messages and materials, you can conduct a series of focus groups with members of different at-risk populations. Ask their opinion on the content, the presentation, whether the materials are sensitive toward their needs and culture, and if the message increases their awareness, changes their opinion and motivates them to change. Work with them to make appropriate changes to these materials so that they meet these goals.