CHAPTER 19
CULTURAL COMPETENCY

INTRODUCTION

Walk a mile in someone else's shoes

As a Master Recycler, you will encounter people whose backgrounds, values and assumptions are quite different than your own. It is easy, often without even realizing that you're doing so, to assume that your own experiences and beliefs are widely shared. Doing so, however, can lead to misinterpretations, misunderstandings and lost opportunities.

Cultural identity influences and shapes human beliefs and behaviors. This extends to behaviors and choices about the consumption of goods and the use of materials – central concerns for Master Recyclers.

Misinterpretations occur primarily when we lack awareness of our own values and behavioral norms and when we project those onto others. In the absence of better knowledge, we tend to assume, instead of finding out, what a behavior means to the person involved. And our assumptions are usually based on our own experiences.

Your success in inspiring behavior change will depend first on your awareness that there are many different and equally valuable experiences and practices. Second, your success will hinge on your ability to bridge those differences and connect with people who may be culturally different from yourself.

Making these connections will enable you to have meaningful conversations with diverse individuals about everyday choices and possible behavior changes that can make our metro region more sustainable. The skills and awareness described above are integral components of cultural competence.

Boys visit the greener cleaner booth.

TERM

Culture: "The language, traditions, history, and ancestry people have in common. All people have culture; it is fluid and dynamic."

Caprice Hollins and Ilsa Govan
Diversity, Equity and Inclusion (2015)

Culture: "A fuzzy set of basic assumptions and values, orientations to life, beliefs, policies, procedures and behavioural conventions that are shared by a group of people, and that influence (but do not determine) each member's behaviour and his/her interpretations of the 'meaning' of other people's behaviour."

Helen Spencer-Oatey
Culturally Speaking.
Culture, Communication and Politeness Theory (2008).

What is culture competence?

Culture is a broad and expansive concept and it is worth pausing to define how it is being used in this chapter. Culture is often used to indicate various intellectual and aesthetic pursuits (literature, art, and performance for example) or the process of self-betterment through those pursuits. In this chapter, however, culture is used in its anthropological or sociological sense to indicate the values, traditions, beliefs, practices and history of a group of people.

Culture is shared, but not perfectly. That is, even if you are part of a culture, that does not mean that everyone who identifies as part of that culture will have the exact same values or beliefs. Individuals also typically have multiple cultural identities. For instance, you could be a Christian who has deep roots in a certain neighborhood, but who also has ancestors from Mexico and who volunteers in schools. Or you could be a Native American who is involved in community organizing and public health, who also has African-American heritage. Each of these identities are distinct cultures.

Cultures are also dynamic and continually changing. This means that each context that you work in will be somewhat different.

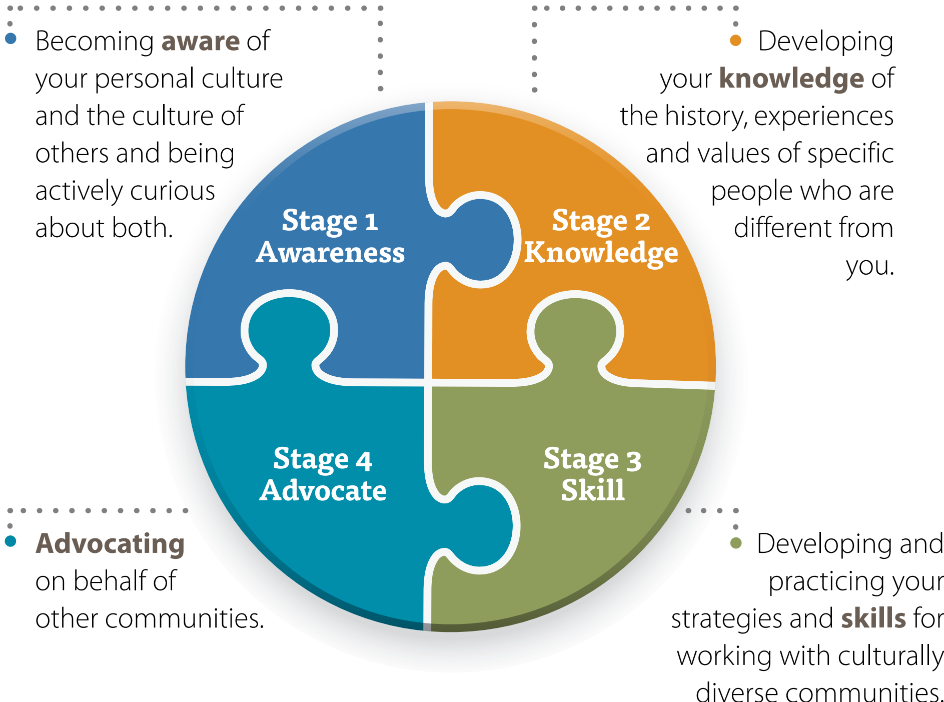
Working across cultures may seem so complicated and evoke such strong emotions that you feel like giving up before you've even started. But please, don't! Connecting and working with diverse communities is absolutely essential to the mission of the Master Recycler Program.

This chapter offers an introduction to cultural competence as an ongoing process with four stages. This four-stage model is from Caprice Hollins and Ilsa Govan's workshop and their book Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion: Strategies for Facilitating Conversations on Race. Hollins and Govan's framework presents cultural competence as an ongoing process of active learning rather than an end point. In this model, to be culturally competent is to embrace your curiosity. It is about exploring your own assumptions about human behavior, values, biases, preconceived notions and personal limitations and it is also about being equally curious about others' behavior, values, biases and preconceived notions.

Caprice Hollins and Ilsa Govan are co-founders of Cultures Connecting a Seattle based group that assists organizations in entering into conversations about race, culture and social justice.

The cultural competence process

Hollis and Govan offer a framework for cultural competence that has four stages, described below. They adapted their framework from Counseling the Culturally Diverse: Theory and Practice by Derald Wing Sue and David Sue.



The stages are not linear and can overlap.

This chapter moves through the first three stages of cultural competence: awareness, knowledge and skill. It concludes with a consideration of how the environmental movement must and is becoming more inclusive and diverse. To the greatest extent possible, specific examples and best practices relevant to Master Recyclers are included. We all have something, indeed many things, to learn about cultural competence. Often this involves unlearning assumptions and habits so that we can more fully see, hear and connect with the people around us. Power structures deeply ingrained in our culture make it so that some of us have had the privilege of learning about cultural competence at our own pace, while others have had to learn cultural competence more quickly, sometimes merely to survive.

At the outset, it is important to acknowledge that Master Recyclers, like the community we serve, are diverse and that this is a tremendous strength of the program. Master Recyclers are already effectively working across cultures and having positive impacts. There is a pervasive assumption that Master Recyclers are largely white, wealthy, English-speaking, homeowners, but survey data lets us know that this is not the case. The program has surveyed each class since 2012. Clearly the program has more work to do to meet objectives of reflecting the demographics of the metro area, but already, 12 percent of respondents identified as people of color and 13 percent claimed a household income below the poverty level. About 37 percent are renters and 25 percent live in multifamily communities. And the following languages are spoken at the homes of your fellow Master Recyclers: Afrikaans, American Sign Language, Arabic, Bulgarian, Cambodian, Chinese (Cantonese and Mandarin), Czech, Djoula, Dutch, French, German, Hindi, Indonesian, Italian, Japanese, Nepali, Portuguese, Romanian, Russian, Spanish, Swahili, Taiwanese, Tamil, Telugu, Vietnamese and West African Krio.

CULTURAL AWARENESS

Exploring ourselves as the cultural beings we all are

The first stage in cultural competence is becoming aware that we all have cultural heritage and that our cultural heritage affects the choices we make.

Cultural competence begins with looking at yourself: Who are you and what do you bring to relationships and situations? Without going through this stage, you may be unaware of cultural differences and believe that you have no reason not to trust your instincts. It may not occur to you that you might be making cultural mistakes, causing confusion or pain for others or simply misinterpreting much of the behavior going on around you.

Humans are cultural beings. We learn to communicate and understand our world through culture: languages, traditions, behaviors, beliefs and values. Our cultural experiences and values shape the way we see ourselves and what we think is important.

We all believe that we observe reality as it is, but what actually happens is that the mind interprets what the eyes see and gives it meaning; it is only at this point, when meaning is assigned, that we can truly say we have seen something. In other words, what we see is very much a product of our minds and their culturally specific ways of interpreting and understanding.

If you realize that the mind of a person from one culture is going to be different in many ways from the mind of a person from another culture, then you have an explanation for that most fundamental of all cross-cultural problems: the fact that two people can look upon the same reality – the same behavior – and see two entirely different things.

An important next step and way out of this impasse is to recognize that your own interpretations are not universal, but rather a product of your culture and lived experience. Individuals from differing cultures often have different interpretations of the same thing. Culturally competent individuals are curious about cultural differences and exploring them to arrive at greater understanding.

Don't be afraid to explore yourself as a cultural being with varying social identities and influences. This is an exercise in pure observation and curiosity.

Valuing cultural differences

Along with reflecting on one's own cultural identity, the awareness stage is about acknowledging that cultural differences as well as similarities exist, and doing so without assigning values (for example, better or worse, right or wrong) to those cultural differences. This can be challenging when values are vastly different from your own.

Consider this example: Rosario is a Master Recycler from the city of Xela in Guatemala. When she lived in Guatemala she had a Quiche Indian neighbor whose yard was full of empty containers. Rosario assumed that her neighbor's yard was full of garbage. But when she talked with her, she learned that her neighbor did not consider it garbage at all. The bottles had at one time contained shampoo and Rosario was stunned to learn that her neighbor saw those bottles as a status symbol. The bottles were evidence that she had enough money to purchase a luxury item such as shampoo.

One can then imagine how ineffective Rosario's initial communication was when she was talking about the "garbage" in the yard. Her neighbor literally didn't know what she was talking about. It was outside of Rosario's experience of relative wealth to think of used shampoo containers as anything other than garbage. Those containers, however, still had value to her neighbor.

Until Rosario could see that the containers were important to her neighbor, they could not have a meaningful dialogue about how they could comfortably live next to each other. Much work still remained for Rosario and her neighbor, but understanding the very different viewpoints from which they were starting was an essential first step. It was crucial that Rosario not discount her neighbor's experience by applying her own assumptions and values to the situation.

How dominant culture limits cultural awareness

The equity chapter explored how institutional racism and poverty result in the inequitable distribution of the benefits and burdens of materials production and consumption. These institutional structures of power also create cultural hierarchies. These cultural hierarchies result in a pervasive dominant culture that is interpreted as the norm. Our cultural institutions tend to reinforce these cultural hierarchies as natural and inevitable.

People of dominant social identity groups have been taught all their lives that what they know and believe are true and that anything different, if it exists at all, is inferior. This creates a significant blind spot that makes it difficult for dominant social groups to fully perceive cultural difference. When a person is part of a dominant social identity, self-reflection and the challenge of truly seeing others is great.

As mentioned in the introduction, people can have multiple cultural identities and some people may have both dominant and marginalized identities. So, people may have blind spots in some areas and not in others.

People from marginalized social identities have had to learn from an early age that what they know to be true is not perceived as true by mainstream society. As soon as these individuals begin to leave the family unit and interact with society at large they start receiving social cues that they need to change their actions to fit in, even if it is contrary to their core beliefs and identity. Not only are their actions in question, but they also often describe a painful process of understanding that their identity as a person is not a normal part of the social community.

One example of a cultural hierarchy that has been naturalized is the hierarchy of male over female. The dominant culture typically portrays "male" as the norm and the standard of humanity, while "female" is considered secondary. "Mankind" is interpreted as all people. Images of mankind are usually images of men, but supposed to be interpreted as all people. Even the portrayal of the evolution of mankind usually starts with a male Neanderthal.

The English language also perpetuates "male" as standard. Until recently, it was grammatically necessary to use the pronoun "he" when referring to a person of unknown gender. While it is now customary to say "he or she" our language and symbols continue to insinuate that there are only two genders, marginalizing communities that do not identify as either "male" or "female." Similar hierarchies exist for race (white over black or non-white), wealth (rich over poor), religion (Christian over non-Christian) and country of origin (European descent over Native or immigrant) – to name just a few.

It is important to be aware that people are made up of a blend of cultural identities some of which are dominant cultures and some of which are marginalized. This overlapping of identity is referred to as **intersectionality**. Intersectionality raises awareness that a person may experience more than one marginalized identity and that these can compound one another. It is also important to be aware that an individual also may enjoy some of the privileges of a dominant identity, but at the same time feel the oppression of a marginalized identity.

While images and language may seem to be purely symbolic, these assumptions can play out in situations of consequence. For example, in scientific research it is often assumed that studies of the human body would be conducted on men and have meaningful results for everyone.

Part of cultural competency is developing an awareness of how cultural hierarchies work. Marginalized groups often internalize (sometimes unconsciously) the power structures and values of dominant social identity groups. Dominant social identity groups, on the other hand, often assume that there is a naturalness and inevitability to the current structures and culture. They may not even know that they exist, even though they benefit from them.

Without understanding the power dynamics of racism, poverty and other social hierarchies, it is difficult if not impossible to practice the self-reflection that is such an important part of the first stage of cultural competence. We cannot understand ourselves or other people, or create greater equity without considering the larger socio-political and historical context of which we are part. We need to have a grasp of different forms of privilege and oppression and how these affect people's experiences, opportunities and access to social power. It is critical to appreciate the interlocking nature of different types of inequality and how these intersect in people's lives.

These inequitable outcomes can make it seem as if the dominant culture is universal, superior, and inevitable. Part of increasing your awareness is to work to realize that:

- The outcomes are not always inevitable or fair.
- There are multiple cultures and these cultures all have valid and valuable views and beliefs.
- That individuals are the experts when it comes to their own lives and situations.

TERM

Intersectionality: the idea that multiple identities intersect to create a whole that is different from the component identities. The theory that individuals think of each element or trait of a person as inextricably linked with all of the other elements in order to fully understand one's identity. Civil rights advocate and legal scholar Kimberlé Williams Crenshaw coined the phrase in 1989.

What's in your garbage? A lesson in awareness

Master Recycler, Janis Woodrow (Class 33), shared a story of her own experience conducting outreach that helps illuminate the importance of cultural awareness.

Janis was helping residents in Portland adjust to curbside collection changes that included composting food scraps and a shift from weekly to every-other-week garbage pickup. She was going door-to-door in neighborhoods that had been identified as having high populations of households with large families since that was a group the City identified through surveys as having more trouble adjusting to the changes.

Janis reported: "It was a real eye-opener to connect with these large working-class households. With both parents working long hours, I witnessed a lot of challenges. When I was canvassing, several residents complained that they had too much garbage to switch to less frequent pickups.

"Looking back, I now realize that my first reactions to this were to judge them as not sufficiently motivated or caring and I then attempted to solve their problem based on my own experience. I tried to explain to them that if they just recycled more they would not have a problem since the recycle cart gets picked up every week. The residents insisted that they were recycling everything. One older woman told me, "I have been recycling longer than you have been alive."

"Finally, I suggested to one man that we go and look at what he had in his can. As we were walking over to his cart, I was imagining I would find recyclables in the garbage. But I was wrong. There was nothing in the garbage that could be recycled. I also noticed his recycling and compost were full of the materials that belonged in there, but there wasn't much in there.

"There is one other thing I noticed: all of the containers had a completely different mix of materials than what I tend to discard. My discards are made up of food scraps, yard debris, junk mail, some glass and cans. Almost all my discards can be recycled or composted. When I looked in his containers there were lots of freezer boxes, and Burgerville and McDonald's containers – all of which are non-recyclable. So really, he was right. He was doing the most recycling he could. He let me know that his teenagers need to make their own dinners since he and his wife are both working when they get home and these are the foods they like.

"After this experience, I started looking in the containers and just observing before giving advice. With residents that had a lot of non-recyclable materials I talked to them less about the importance of recycling and more about their options in garbage size. Many didn't know that they could order a larger container and were happy that they had choices."

Janis' initial strategy was based on two assumptions, both of which turned out to be false. First, that residents who generate more garbage than she does do not care much about recycling. Second, that people all consume the same materials as she does and therefore have the same discards.

It turned out that the East Portland residents she spoke with, like most metro area residents, want to recycle. Janis' misperception was based on a misunderstanding of the community and an eagerness to apply her own experience to a different context. She found that she was more successful when she stopped assuming what she would find in the various containers, listened to one man's experience and gave him tools that addressed those concerns specifically.

Practicing cultural awareness.

Here are some ideas to get you started in practicing cultural awareness. Cultural awareness is a lifelong process and while this list is not exhaustive, it can stimulate your curiosity and get you started on your journey.

- When talking with people about recycling, compost, waste prevention or toxics reduction, listen for moments when you might be experiencing cultural differences. Perhaps they will say something unexpected or that doesn't fit with your experience. Perhaps they don't say something, but get quiet or react strongly to something you might have said. Try and go to a reflective mode rather than a reactive one. Notice if you have a reaction that tries to place their experience in the 'good' or 'bad' category and try to turn that reaction off.
- Ask respectful questions to learn more about the perspective of people. Use follow-up questions if there are still aspects of that perspective that doesn't make sense to you.
- Check your own experience and biases that might affect how you feel about these topics and how it might affect your reaction to people who have different experiences.
- Avoid holding preconceived limitations and notions about communities different from your own.
- Reflect on whether your own values, beliefs and experiences come from a dominant or marginalized cultural perspective and how that perspective might affect oppressed groups.
- Understand that mistakes are inevitable. Don't beat yourself up, if you discover that you have said something that has offended someone as this is not very useful to either of you. If appropriate you can apologize. It is best not to try and explain your mistake as it can come across as making excuses and discounting their experience. A simple, "I am sorry," and then taking the time to reflect internally or asking others is usually a good strategy.
- Identify a person from your own culture to join you in the journey so that you can reflect on experiences together and exchange notes and ideas in a safe environment.

CULTURAL KNOWLEDGE

With cultural awareness typically comes the desire to learn more about other cultures and, indeed, the next stage is cultivating cultural knowledge. You don't have to complete the awareness stage to go to this stage and the awareness stage is, in truth, never ending.

The next stage is to seek out information about the cultural groups you might be working with so that your volunteer work can be as effective as possible. You might learn that a group is already practicing some of the actions you are promoting, if they have practices of their own that are equally beneficial and if that community has specific taboos or values that are related to the topic you are working on or related to communication styles.

It's best to do your homework before you enter a community and consider asking for something from that community. This stage also gives you an opportunity to appreciate what communities are already doing in the terms that they care about and understand. Finally, doing your homework helps you avoid making cultural mistakes or at least helps you understand what happened when you do misstep.

The green values of people of color

As an illustration of how the knowledge stage works, we will explore information that can help us know more about people of color and how they relate to the environment.

Because white and wealthy culture is dominant in America, the environmental movement, like other U.S. institutions, is dominated by white beliefs and perceptions about the environment. The dominant environmental movement has traditionally assumed that communities of color need to be coerced into supporting the environment. Even people of color have sometimes internalized this assumption.

This assumption is simply not true and it is a dangerous misconception. A great deal of public opinion research shows that people of color care deeply about the environment.

Here are some findings that help us learn more about the green values people of color:

- 95 percent of metro area consider themselves recyclers. In other words, almost everyone in our metro area sees her or himself as a recycler. (Metro internal studies 2009 and 2015).
- Latino voters in the US have a strong commitment to conservation, the environment and a genuine interest in how climate change impacts their families and communities.
- Most Asian Americans hold particularly strong green values. Seventy percent of Asian-Americans consider themselves environmentalist, compared to 41 percent of Americans overall, and 60 percent of Asian-American prioritize environmental protection over economic growth, compared to 41 percent overall.
- African-Americans in many cases are equally supportive, and often more supportive of national climate and energy policies, than white Americans. In particular, 89 percent of blacks supported the regulation of carbon dioxide as a pollutant, compared to 78 percent of whites.)

For more information, you can consult the following resources online: Latino Decisions Polls and Research, National Asian American Survey, Yale project on Climate Change and George Mason University Center for Climate Change Communication.

Do you identify as a BIPOC Master Recycler? Join MRoC (Master Recyclers of Color)! They have monthly meetups and network on their Facebook group and Google group MRoC_pdx.

Visit the African American Outdoor Association Facebook page to learn more.

Diverse experiences with the environment

A historical perspective on how communities experience the environment can help build cultural knowledge. The two case studies that follow offer culturally diverse experiences on wilderness and environmental activism.

CASE STUDY: African American Outdoor Association

Evelyn White wrote in Black Women and the Wilderness, "For me, the fear is like a heartbeat, always present, while at the same time, intangible, elusive, and difficult to define," White says as she explains why the thought of hiking in Oregon used to fill her with dread. In wilderness, White did not see freedom but a "portal to the past. It was a trigger. The history of suffering was overwhelming."

"***Wilderness*** says to the minority: Be in this place and someone might seize the opportunity to end you. Nature itself is the least of my concerns. Bear paws have harmed fewer black bodies in the wild than human hands."

Greg Wolley and Tricia Tillman founded the African American Outdoor Association because they recognized this historical context of fear of the wilderness for African Americans and wanted to do something about it. The Association aims to:

- Conduct active outdoor excursions that encourage African Americans to explore the natural environment.
- Promote healthy living by encouraging families to shift to physically active lifestyles.
- Increase knowledge and appreciation of the beauty and natural resources of the Pacific Northwest.
- Build community around active living.

"They say Black people don't bike, kayak, etc.," Wolley says. "Students of color are not seeing images of people in natural resources that look like them – they don't have role models."

Wolley says that politics is a big reason why the outdoors is predominantly visited by white people. From the park system's inception, Jim Crow laws and Native American removal campaigns limited access to recreation by race. From the mountains to the beaches, outdoor leisure was often officially accompanied by the words 'whites only'. The repercussions for disobedience were grave.

Tillman told Metro in a story about the Association that she hopes that exposing black residents to the outdoors will not only improve their health but also change the way they connect with nature. "In some ways, [the African American Outdoor Association is] about reclaiming the space and breaking through barriers, as well as mental barriers, to create more of a welcoming environment,"

Many participants use the outings organized by Tillman's group as training for their own, more independent outdoor explorations.

Tillman has witnessed on countless occasions the spiritual connections participants experience. The joy and wonder they feel when they are outdoors are palpable, she said. She'll frequently hear people say, "God is so good," and "God is so amazing," as participants are emotionally moved by the beauty that surrounds them.

The outings have also connected participants with their ancestors, who navigated and survived the outdoors to escape slavery, Tillman said. "People reframe how they think of the woods," she said. "It goes from scary to safe and liberating."

CASE STUDY: Honduran immigrant environmentalist

Edgar (whose name is changed for this story) is an Oregon immigrant. He grew up in Honduras with strong ties to the rivers that came from his Lenca indigenous culture that depended on those waterways for spiritual as well as practical purposes.

Edgar became an active environmentalist as a young adult. He had visited El Salvador where people fought to stop the contamination of their rivers by Canadian gold companies and he joined the Council of Indigenous Peoples of Honduras (Copinh) which fought multi-national corporations that aimed to build a dam through his community of Rio Blanco.

By this time, he already knew that being an environmentalist was dangerous. "Unlike people here (in the US) who can decide to make little changes in their homes, back home being an environmentalist was a whole different commitment." Edgar's comrades in El Salvador had been murdered for standing against the gold mining.

In 2016, Berta Cáceres, who had brought national attention to the issue of the dams in Honduras was murdered. Edgar knew that the murder of Berta Cáceres was not unique. He said, "environmentalists are regularly murdered in Honduras." The international NGO "Global Witness" confirms his experience in a published study that declared Honduras "the most dangerous country in the world for environmentalists." According to research conducted by the organization, some 120 environmentalists have been killed in Honduras since 2010 because they were trying to protect the environment.

Now that Edgar lives in Portland he is not vocal or active about his work as an environmentalist in Honduras. He left Honduras out of fear for his life and is not convinced that the danger is over because he lives in the United States. "It was countries like this one that caused the violence, so why should I believe they won't come after me here?"

These two examples show two different experiences with the environment and environmentalism. They both demonstrate how the power dynamics of race affect how individuals experience the environment and environmentalism. They also showcase people who deeply value natural spaces and are active as environmental advocates. Both cases, however, are quite different from the mainstream, white environmental movement.

On being humble: Humility has traditionally thought of as meekness, but it can also be a willingness to accurately assess oneself and one's limitations, the ability to acknowledge gaps in one's knowledge, and an openness to new ideas, contradictory information, and advice. First and foremost, cultural humility means not pigeon-holing people. Knowledge of different cultures and their assumptions and practices is indeed important, but it can only go so far. It is important to not assume that all members of a culture conform to a certain stereotype. Approaching each encounter with the knowledge that one's own perspective is full of assumptions and prejudices can help one to keep an open mind and remain respectful.

Cultivating cultural knowledge

The following pointers can help you cultivate cultural knowledge before volunteering in a community that you are not familiar with.

- Ask the leader, or contact who invited you to volunteer, what populations might attend the event.
- Ask them if there are appropriate ways to behave, dress, or talk in this community.
- Visit the community as a guest before presenting to them as speaker.
- Think about your own biases with this particular community and how they might affect your conversations.

CULTURAL SKILL

Stage three is about developing and practicing strategies and skills for working with culturally diverse communities. This stage can be about building skills to work with a specific community that is different than your own or about strategies to be inclusive while working in a multicultural setting.

Language cultural competency

Master Recyclers participate in many projects and events where language cultural competency can be a useful skill. It is helpful to speak more than one language, but even if English is your only language, there are some techniques that can help you successfully make connections in communities that predominantly speak a language other than English.

Eva Aguilar of Washington County works with Master Recyclers on recycling and the Eat Smart, Waste Less campaign at multiple Latino cultural events in Hillsboro, Cornelius and Forest Grove. Eva identified skills that Master Recyclers can build that would help inspire people to take action, and avoid some common cultural missteps. Eva is enthusiastic to work with bilingual Master Recyclers. However, even if you speak no Spanish she believes that your presence at these events are an important invitation to the Latino community to join in.

Eva Aguilar (Class 63) posts volunteer opportunities throughout the year on the Master Recycler volunteer calendar. If you are interested in making a difference while also learning some cultural competency skills, look for volunteer opportunities to work with her.

Eva Aguilar was hired in November 2016 to a new position as the Washington County Bilingual Solid Waste and Recycling Program Educator. She focuses on equity and diversity work, residential and business sector outreach. Eva is a Master Recycler who moved to Hillsboro 11 years ago, from Mexico. Her talent and experience working with nonprofits in the U.S. and Mexico helps Washington County better serve their diverse communities.

Volunteering in a diverse community: A barrier or an opportunity? By Eva Aguilar

Even though Latinos represent the largest minority community in Oregon (12 percent), due to the diversity among this group, cultural elements are not always shared. Therefore, when doing outreach, it's important to focus on similarities, rather than differences, and this is applicable with any other minority group, and not only with Latinos. That being said; the question is how to deliver your message to a diverse, multicultural, multilingual audience?

I believe that understanding cultural differences in depth is critical when developing equitable, inclusive and culturally responsive plans and educational materials, but I invite volunteers to situate their experience at the most basic, human experience level where two persons perform a communication process.

Below is a list of suggestions derived from observations during my tabling and presentations experiences:

- When planning and preparing an outreach event, ask for information about the audience expected and their usual agenda.
- Find out if you will have materials in different languages, or if there is interpretation service available.
- Set up your table in a way that any materials in different languages are visible.
- Enjoy the engagement opportunity and don't be too nervous about interacting with people who do not speak your language. When someone overcomes their own shyness, and asks a question, it denotes genuine interest.
- Avoid stereotyping and don't make assumptions based on visual clues – it is not possible to know anyone's identity based on how they look, and making assumptions frequently may be misleading and inaccurate.
- Start the conversation enthusiastically, naturally and respectfully as you would usually do. This is a brief two-way interaction, and you are not required to know all the specific customs and traditions, just as the other person does not know yours. Therefore, focus on what you have in common, which is an interest in the same topic and go from there!
- Listen and notice any second language learner's typical characteristics, not to judge but to help you determine how to better serve the person. These characteristics include: different accents, linguistic errors, mispronunciation, etc. Keep in mind that English proficiency levels do not necessarily indicate level of education.
- Be patient and acknowledge the other person's effort to communicate. If you understand at least a little, that will enable you to engage.

- People may directly ask if you have materials in their language. If you do, hand them out, briefly explain what they are and remain available for questions.
- If you are with staff or another volunteer that speaks the same language as the person you are trying to communicate with, you can give that person the option to talk with your partner at the table. Notice that you don't need to do that immediately, you will be surprised to see how many times you will be able to successfully communicate.
- Be resourceful. Writing a word on a piece of paper may be helpful for those whose reading and writing skills are more advanced than their speaking skills.
- Show empathy. Think about a relative, a friend, or the friend of a friend who doesn't speak the same language. Remember that time when you were at a restaurant trying to place your order from a menu written in another language? What has been helpful for you?
- Speak clearly and slowly. Adjust the tone and pace of your voice as needed to emphasize what is important.
- Some community members are illiterate in any language and unable to read text-based information. If this is the case, use simple words and combine them with visual, corporal elements as much as possible. Example: "Please sign over this line" (pointing to the form and to the line where they should sign and trace a signature in the air with your hands)
- Be creative - use what you have in the surrounding to "fill in the blanks" and complete your sentences. (Trees, signs, buildings, etc.)
- Ask a person's relative or another community member if they are willing to serve as an interpreter.
- In any case, if you cannot continue the conversation, make a note for the organizers. It is helpful if you or the person writes down contact information to follow up.
- Provide a business card or a written note with the office or staff contact information to personally request more help.
- Remember that the feeling and the interest is mutual, but volunteers hold a resource to share and the potential recipient is there. Community members from different countries of origin and with various cultural backgrounds may possibly be receiving information that is entirely new for them. That fact by itself maximizes the possibilities to turn your efforts into a positive impact.
- Always have fun and be proud of yourself because volunteers help to transform individual bowls full of different veggies into an exquisite, delectable salad.

Language is one of the barriers to effective communication and it is difficult to overcome, but volunteers can help to do it. Master Recyclers may not realize how much of themselves they are giving when doing outreach, but it happens all the time, through words and thorough many non-verbal expressions; that is something other people appreciate, regardless of the language they speak.

Feedback I have received from some Spanish speakers:

- I know is difficult but I really, really appreciate the effort they do to understand me and to respond to my questions.
- It feels personal when people show interest in what you need and do their best to help you, I am thankful because they gave me materials I can read.
- I have trouble speaking English, but I can understand a lot and when they speak slowly, I can follow the conversation.

Building skills in conducting outreach in multicultural settings

Even individuals of the same culture have a wide range of learning styles and motivators. Add multiple cultures and it becomes clear that the best practice for outreach is to vary how you are getting your messages across and to touch on a wide range of reasons to act.

Using varied methods of communication can help you and your audience. The traditional presentation approach of standing in front of a group of people and assuming that you know more than anyone in the room can be intimidating to you, alienating to the community and can cause you to miss opportunities to learn from the other people in the room.

Master Recyclers can practice a variety of interactive communication techniques.

- Consider playing a game where people can share what they know and find out what they don't know in a safe environment.
- Invite people to share stories that offer the opportunity to celebrate their differing perspectives, successes, resources and ideas.
- Utilize visual elements of all sorts. Images, maps, or drawings can all be compelling and engaging.

It is also highly recommended to cultivate your listening skills.

- Listen to people as the experts in their own lives rather than thinking you must be an expert that can help them.
- Be willing to learn from what others share.
- Ask questions, explore problems and understand a person's motivations before offering solutions.
- Try to turn off the voice inside your head that is trying to interpret another person's experiences through your own experiences.
- Be willing to have courageous conversations. If someone is offended by something, try to step back before you react and try to switch to a listening mode not an explaining or justifying mode.

Be prepared to make mistakes. When you make mistakes, try to learn from them. It may not be appropriate to ask the person who was hurt to explain to you what you did to offend them, but you can read online, ask the leader who had invited you. You can also find more resources and ideas in the tabling and presentation chapter of this Handbook.

CONCLUSION: STAGE FOUR MAKING ROOM IN THE ENVIRONMENTAL MOVEMENT

Master Recyclers promote sustainability in a number of different areas including recycling, composting, waste prevention, toxics reduction and food waste. Some of you may decide that you want to pursue the goal of diversifying who participates in the sustainability movement.

Given the strong levels of support for green values that exist amongst people of color, one area of interest for some Master Recyclers is to increase the number of people of color who join the program. A small group called MRoC (Master Recyclers of Color) was formed in the spring of 2017 to socialize, support each other and to make room for more diversity in the environmental movement.

For those who identify with the environmental movement, a core tenet of cultural competency is to understand that if you make room for people who are culturally different than you, you may need to be flexible about shifting your priorities so that everyone is legitimately involved in defining the goals and purpose of the movement.

Many of the richest examples of sustainability movements have grown out of shifts in worldview that include social justice, environmental justice, and new ways of understanding economics. Environmental justice focuses on toxics and the impacts of consumption on low-income residents and workers. Climate justice focuses on the disproportionate impacts that a hotter climate and climate disasters have on low-income communities and developing nations. The regenerative economy movement offers an alternative model of extracting resources and compensating workers so that value is given to natural assets such as the earth. Regenerative economics offers a new model where the environment provides resources in a regenerative way and workers are cooperative contributors to developing goods for the well-being of everyone.

Some Master Recyclers included social justice and advocacy as part of their volunteer hours. If this is of interest to you, you can discuss with the Master Recycler Program Manager ways you can integrate this work in your own community. Or if you are looking for ways to plug into existing projects you might contact some of the partners where Master Recyclers are already engaged in this topic.

Contacts can be found for these projects in the Places to Volunteer chapter of the Handbook

- **Center for Diversity and the Environment Mission statement:** We harness the power of racial and ethnic diversity to transform the environmental movement by developing leaders, catalyzing change within institutions and building alliances.
- **Master Recyclers of Color (MRoC)** is a community group for any individual who identifies as Black, Indigenous or a Person of Color, who is interested in waste and recycling. They have a monthly meetup the second Wednesday of the month and a Google group (groups.google.com/g/MROC_PDX).
- **Trash for peace** works on youth empowerment, business outreach, and creative bin designs all focused on achieving their vision: Empowered, healthy communities living in a world without waste.
- **Washington County Bilingual Outreach Coordinator, Eva Aguilar** works with Master Recyclers on recycling and the Eat Smart, Waste Less campaign at multiple Latino cultural events in Hillsboro, Cornelius and Forest Grove. Eva_Aguilar@co.washington.or.us