

Elements of Culture

A person's culture is defined by many elements. When you are working to build your coalition, try to take into consideration these types of issues. Is your meeting style comfortable for members from another culture? What about room set-up? How might gender roles within a culture impact membership within the coalition? Are there taboos of which you should be aware?

Coalitions have found that considering the following terms/issues to be helpful when striving to be inclusive of other cultures when planning meetings and community outreach efforts.

- **Aesthetics** - attitudes and behaviors related to literature, music, dance, art, architecture.
- **Ceremony** - attitudes and behaviors related to what a person should say and do on particular occasions.
- **Communication forms** - attitudes and behaviors related to personal space, greeting, voice tone, eye contact, touch, smiling, facial or emotional expression, gestures, humor.
- **Ethics** - attitudes and behaviors related to honesty, fairness, principles.
- **Folk myths** - attitudes and behaviors related to heroes, traditions, legendary characters, superstitions.
- **Formality versus informality** - attitudes and behaviors related to ways members address each other.
- **Gender roles** - attitudes and behaviors related to expectations of people based on their gender.
- **Generational interrelationships and kinship patterns** - i.e., independent, interdependent, dependent, extended, augmented.
- **Grooming and presence** - attitudes and behaviors related to physical appearance, such as hairstyle, cosmetics, dress.
- **Health and medicine** - attitudes and behaviors related to wellness, sickness.
- **Individual orientation versus group orientation** - attitudes and behaviors related to whether the welfare of the individual or the unity of the group takes precedence.
- **Language and linguistics** - language, wording, and structure of speech.
- **Recreation** - attitudes and behaviors related to how people spend their leisure time.
- **Relationship focus versus goal focus** - attitudes and behaviors related to whether the maintenance of interpersonal relationships or the achievement of goals is more important.
- **Relationships** - attitudes and behaviors related to connections between family members, friends.

- **Rewards and privileges** - attitudes and behaviors related to motivation, merit, achievement, service.
- **Rights and duties** - attitudes and behaviors related to personal obligations, voting, taxes, military service, legal rights.
- **Sex and romance** - attitudes and behaviors related to courtship, marriage.
- **Spirituality** - attitudes and behaviors related to spirituality, prayer, purpose in life, the possibility and type of afterlife.
- **Status** - attitudes and behaviors related to people of different rank, e.g., age, wealth, office, fame.
- **Subsistence** - attitudes and behaviors related to providing for oneself and providing for the young and the old, also related to who protects whom.
- **Taboos** - attitudes and behaviors related to doing things against accepted norms.
- **Time** - attitudes and behaviors related to being early, on time, or late; concepts and relational nature of past, present, future.
- **Values** - attitudes and behaviors related to what is desirable or good.

Adapted from Gonzalez, V.M., Gonzalez, J.T., Freeman, V., & Howard-Pitney, B. (1991). Health promotion in diverse cultural communities: Practical guidelines for working in and with diverse cultural communities. Health Promotion Resource Center, Stanford Center for Research in Disease Prevention in cooperation with the Henry J. Kaiser Family Foundation.