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## MCH Innovations Database Practice Summary & Implementation Guidance



# Cultural Brokering

Cultural brokers at the Center for Family Involvement (CFI) @ VCU provide enhanced one-to-one emotional, informational, and systems navigational support to racially, ethnically, and/or linguistically diverse families of children with disabilities and special health care needs.



Location

Richmond, VA



Topic Area

Family/Youth Engagement;  
Health Equity



Setting

Community



Population Focus

CYSHCN; Families/Consumers



NPM

NPM 11: Medical Home



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# Section 1: Practice Summary

## PRACTICE DESCRIPTION

Cultural brokering is the “act of bridging, linking or mediating between groups or persons of differing cultural systems for the purpose of reducing conflict or producing change” (Jezewski, 1995, p. 20). A cultural broker is a person who serves as an intermediary between individuals, hospitals (for example) or different cultural groups with the aim of helping people effectively navigate the health, education or human service system. Cultural brokering has been increasingly used in healthcare and education to provide appropriate and effective services to culturally & linguistically diverse families. In 2005, the Center for Family Involvement @ VCU established our MCHB funded Family to Family (F2F) Health Information Center to support families of children who have a disability or special healthcare need. In 2009, after receiving an increase in federal and state funding, the program director allocated funds to focus their services on culturally & linguistically diverse communities and develop a cultural brokering initiative in response to the difficulties and barriers these families were experiencing in accessing and understanding disability benefits, services and supports. Since 2009, our F2F program has hired 8 parents of children and youth with disabilities to act as cultural brokers and served over 600 linguistically diverse families with intensive support. Annually, approximately 46% of the F2F callers served by all CFI staff identify as culturally & linguistically diverse.

The cultural brokers represent African American, Arabic, Asian, Latino/a/x, and refugee/immigrant communities. These cultural brokers work 12–20 hours per week 1) providing enhanced one-to-one emotional, informational, and systems navigational support to culturally & linguistically diverse families of children with disabilities and special health care needs, and 2) partnering with agencies in the community to improve equitable access to services and supports.

## CORE COMPONENTS & PRACTICE ACTIVITIES

The goal of the cultural broker initiative is to help culturally & linguistically diverse families understand and effectively navigate the education, health, and disability systems, and successfully get resources and services that meet the needs of their children with disabilities and special healthcare needs. We do this through cultural brokers serving as a bridge between these service systems and culturally and linguistically diverse families.

The core components of this program include: training to prepare cultural brokers for the intervention of emotional, informational and systems navigational support; having cultural brokers map resources to understand their communities; providing culturally appropriate outreach and networking methods with families, professionals, and service and community agencies; recruiting families to serve as “family navigators” to meet the diverse needs of other families; and assessing the effectiveness of the cultural brokering intervention.

### Core Components & Practice Activities

Core Component

Activities

Operational Details



Training	Training and support for cultural brokering	Cultural brokers receive several levels of training upon hire: 4-6 hours of basic employee onboarding trainings (i.e., team work, goal setting, public speaking, data entry); 8-10 hours of Parent to Parent USA evidenced informed family to family support (i.e., role of cultural broker, active listening, cultural agility); and 4-6 hour of leadership behavior development (i.e., emotional intelligence, effective collaboration, and communication). Cultural brokers are also expected to participate in ongoing professional development such as person-centered practices training, special education topical conferences and webinars, and culturally specific events.
Mapping	Mapping resources	Cultural brokers map education/social services/health systems, cultural/ethnic associations, and other community-based organizations for the community they support.
Understanding	Understanding community under support	Cultural brokers understand traditions and beliefs of the diverse community for whom they represent or support and develop and sustain a trusting and supportive relationship with schools, organizations, and families in that community.
Outreaching	Use outreach methods to support families	Cultural brokers use culturally appropriate outreach methods to find support families of children with disabilities, educating families the disability system, providing emotional support, and helping them locate and access education, healthcare, and other resources they need.
Networking and bridging	Networking with professionals and organizations, and bridging service providers and families	Cultural brokers build connections with professionals and culturally specific organizations to address the divergent needs of children and families in their respective communities and serve as a “bridge” between service providers and families of children with disabilities and special health care needs.
Recruiting	Recruiting and training family navigators	Cultural brokers recruit and train qualified parents to serve as volunteer “family navigators” who provide peer support for families of children with disabilities in their communities.
Assessment	Assessment of the effectiveness of cultural brokering intervention	The F2F program conducts surveys and interviews to learn about families’ satisfaction with the cultural brokering intervention and suggestions to better meet their needs in the future.



## HEALTH EQUITY

Cultural brokering contributes to reducing health inequities and systemic oppression by ensuring culturally & linguistically diverse families of children with disabilities and special health care needs have equal access to resources and services including education, social service and healthcare services. Research has documented that the intersection of different cultural identities, such as nationalities, races, ethnicities, disabilities, and/or languages, can create strong barriers for culturally diverse families and service providers to understand each other and build effective partnerships (Kalyanpur & Harry, 2012; Lindsay et al., 2012; Mueller, 2014). Culturally & linguistically diverse families may have little knowledge about the disability system in the United States (Lynch & Stein 1982; Mirza & Heinemann, 2012), speak a different language (Jung, 2011), and not understand their rights and responsibilities in receiving education, social services and healthcare (Tratcher, 2012). Culturally and linguistically diverse parents frequently reported that they felt lost, overwhelmed, stressed, powerless, and marginalized in the education and healthcare system (e.g., Childre & Chambers, 2005; Lake & Billingsley, 2000; Valle, 2011). The cultural brokering practice that brings together Parent to Parent, cultural brokering in health care and intersectionality evidence-informed practices can ameliorate barriers caused by cultural differences and cultural intersections and help culturally & linguistically diverse families of children with disabilities and special health care needs better engage with schools, healthcare providers and other human service agencies and access and utilize disability related services that meet the needs of their children (Azzopardi & McNeill, 2016; Brar-Josan & Yohani, 2017).

## EVIDENCE OF EFFECTIVENESS

In addition to ongoing literature reviews, we use a mixed method approach combining surveys and interviews to evaluate the effectiveness of the F2F cultural brokering practice. We have conducted semi-structured interviews with key informants to understand their perspectives in the role of cultural brokers in providing F2F support. We have conducted semi-structured interviews with cultural brokers to tease out their understanding of their role and to learn about their experiences with families including their effectiveness in meeting families' needs. We have also conducted a survey and semi-structured interviews with culturally & linguistically diverse parents of children with disabilities served by cultural brokers to learn about their experiences receiving cultural brokering services and their satisfaction with this program.

Six cultural brokers who worked or are now working as cultural brokers participated in interviews where they reported that they had been successfully meeting the divergent needs of culturally & linguistically diverse families of children with disabilities and special health care needs, and even helped some parents grow and become a family navigator who supported other families. For example, one cultural broker reported, "She [a Latina mother of a child with disabilities] mentioned applying for a waiver and her child was found ineligible...I helped her, I told her about the assessment tool that was used and told that you really need to think about how you would answer the questions with the assessment tool...And then I told her about different resources, like the Partners in Policymaking training...She went to the training, graduating from that program. She became a family navigator with our program..." Another cultural broker shared her experience working with a family of a son with autism from Sudan, "He [the son] had a lot of behavior issues...They [family] had no idea about respite care and personal care attendance... And they didn't really know anyone to ask for...I was able to walk them through that process and help them with the evaluation... they were able to access Medicaid, and access to respite care providers, and all that."

We also received 30 survey responses and conducted 14 interviews with culturally & linguistically diverse parents supported by cultural brokers. Results show that 94% of respondents reported that they were satisfied with the services, of which about 75% reported that they were very satisfied with the services. Also, over half of



respondents said that cultural brokers served as translators and listeners during the service; about 38% reported cultural brokers were liaisons and educators; and about 19% reported that cultural brokers were mediators. Findings also show that about 93% of parents reported that cultural brokers always or most of the time do what they promised to do; 88% reported that cultural brokers always or most of the time provide services in time; and about 81% reported that cultural brokers were easy to reach. The interview data also support the findings of the survey data. Parents reported that cultural brokers were effective in solving their problems and meeting their needs by listening to their experiences and needs, educating them about disability services, interpreting information, guiding them through the process, connecting them with service providers and helping address conflicts in communications. For example, an African American mother said, "It was helpful that she [cultural broker] steered me in the right direction of the different issues that I was having with them, my school system here, and different resources and different people that I can contact to help." Another Latino parent reported, "She [cultural broker] helped me, providing information and explaining about the differences that I was confused about at first...She is still helping me clear up the confusions that I have, listening to me and still helping me when I have questions about schools, therapy and insurance."

Some biases that may impact our practice implementation include cultural and language barriers. We received a very low response rate for our survey to culturally & linguistically diverse parents of children with disabilities, even though we offered our survey in three different languages (i.e., English, Spanish and Arabic). We acknowledge that there are some parents who do not speak these three languages and were excluded from the survey. Second, we added a telephone interview option using the Language Line with parents who do not prefer to speak English and recognize that some information may be lost in the interpretation. Third, even though we included parents from different cultural backgrounds, we still need to increase the number of parents in the survey and/or interview to include as many parents as possible to increase the representativeness of our evaluation data.



# Section 2: Implementation Guidance

## COLLABORATORS AND PARTNERS

Practice Collaborators and Partners		
Partner/Collaborator	How are they involved in decision-making throughout practice processes?	Does this stakeholder have lived experience/come from a community impacted by the practice?
Families of children with disabilities and special health care needs	Parents of children with disabilities and special health care needs are surveyed and interviewed on their experiences receiving cultural brokering services, and their perspectives are used to inform program design	Yes, they are our clients who receive services from the program
Key informers	Key informers are interviewed on their understanding of cultural brokering and their perspectives are used to improve the cultural brokering practice	No. key informers are scholars and/or professionals who have worked in the disability field for at least 10 years, and professional and/or research experience on cultural brokerage, cultural competency and other culture issues related to disabilities. They are not from the communities or populations that we serve. But some of them are professionals who have been supporting culturally diverse families for decades.
Cultural brokers	Cultural brokers are interviewed on their understanding of cultural brokering and their experiences providing cultural brokering services. Their perspectives are used to inform the program design and implementation.	Yes. Cultural brokers are directly from the communities they support - they represent their communities.



Funders

Funders provide the money to support cultural brokers work (e.g., time/effort, travel, professional development)

No. Funders are typically state agencies who have a mandate to reach ALL families served by their system.

## REPLICATION

The way we developed and implemented the cultural brokering initiative within a family to family program required combining evidence-informed practices of Parent to Parent support and cultural brokering. Human nature is to alter support provided to a family based on personal stories, needing to start with where the other parent 'is at' and with the cultural brokers' preferred traditions. But for determining efficacy to a model of cultural brokering and eventual replicability, it was important for the cultural brokers to all have the same base training and to stick to script as much as possible. To date, the program has not been replicated by us in another organization.

## INTERNAL CAPACITY

Our cultural brokering practice has received invaluable support from our organization, community partners and funders. Internally, key staff includes:

- 1) Center for Family Involvement Director who secures funding for cultural brokers, manages grants and contracts that include cultural brokers, hires and supervises cultural brokers, and manages the cultural broker initiative. Approximately .12 FTE is needed.
- 2) Cultural Brokers who provide daily parent to parent support to families and offer support groups. Approximately .30-.60 FTE per cultural broker.
- 3) Data Manager who supports cultural brokers to maintain information of callers in a database for funder reporting. Approximately .05 FTE is needed
- 4) Evaluator who work closely with cultural brokers to carry out evaluation activities for continuous quality improvement. Approximately .10 is needed.
- 5) HR/Fiscal Technicians who assist with payroll and processing of cultural broker travel and equipment needs, for example. Approximately .03 FTE is needed.

In addition to people, organizational support for a cultural brokering initiative also includes access to technology (i.e., computers, cell phones) and to interpreting and translation services (e.g., language line) to support callers preferring languages for which we do not have a cultural broker and for developing materials in preferred languages and formats (e.g. fotonovela on early intervention services)





## PRACTICE TIMELINE

Below are a few example activities for planning and implementing a cultural broker initiative. Please contact Dana Yarbrough at [dvyarbrough@vcu.edu](mailto:dvyarbrough@vcu.edu) for more information.

Phase: Planning/Pre-Implementation		
Activity Description	Time Needed	Responsible Party
Language Access Plan (determine language needs in community and prioritize focus community/ies)	3 months	Designate someone who can search reports on community demographics (e.g., census, school child find count)
Seek Funding (determine needs, develop draft budget, write grants, etc.)	Ongoing	Program director, agency director, board of directors
Hire Cultural Broker(s) (develop job descriptions, translate, post, interview, hire)	Ongoing	Hiring manager, program director
Onboard Cultural Broker(s) (provide internal training on company policies, parent to parent support, needed skills identified during hiring and personnel evaluation processes, etc)	First 3 months after hire and ongoing	Hiring manager, program director
Set up communication platforms (website, social media, toll free line, etc)	2 months	Program director, agency director
Finalize Cultural Broker Program Materials (flyers, brochures, referral forms, etc in identified language(s))	4 months	Cultural broker(s), program director



## Phase: Implementation

Activity Description	Time Needed	Responsible Party
Establish Partnership with Schools, Clinics and Service Agencies (reach out to share information about the cultural broker program, develop referral mechanism, brainstorm ways to collaborate)	3 months; ongoing	Cultural broker(s), program director
Provide Cultural Broker Support (provide 1:1 or group support to families and document work in a database)	ongoing	Cultural broker(s), data manager
Evaluate Cultural Broker Support (collect impact and satisfaction data from families, agencies, cultural brokers) and meet regularly to improve program	Ongoing	Evaluation specialist, cultural brokers, program manager

## Phase: Sustainability

Activity Description	Time Needed	Responsible Party
Document Cultural Program Success (develop reports from program evaluation to share with funders, community partners, including seeking additional activities for Cultural Brokers)	2 months each year	Evaluation specialist
Write Grants (seek funding through formal and informal grants and contracts processes)	Ongoing	Program manager, agency director



## PRACTICE COST

A sample annual budget for a cultural broker initiative can be found below.

Budget			
Activity/Item	Brief Description	Quantity	Total
Personnel: Supervising Manager	Person responsible for hiring, supervising, mentoring cultural broker	.13 FTE	\$8,450
Personnel: Cultural Broker	People responsible for serving as cultural brokers	.50 X 4 cultural brokers	\$84,000 (or \$21,000 each)
Personnel: Evaluation Specialist	Person responsible for evaluating work of cultural brokers	.10 FTE	\$8,000
Personnel: Data and Admin Supports	People who help with data entry, HR, payroll, and fiscal needs	.08 FTE	\$3,850
Fringe Benefits	Costs for workers comp, insurance, etc.	30%	\$31,300
Travel	Mileage stipends and conference travel for cultural brokers conducting in person support, training, etc	\$1,500 mileage stipend X 4 cultural brokers (approx. \$125/mo each) \$750 x 4 cultural brokers for conference fees	\$9,000



Supplies	Office supplies, equipment, postage	\$600 x 4 cultural brokers for general office supplies  \$1,200 x 4 cultural brokers for ipad, laptop and/or printer	\$7,200
Telephone/Cell Stipends	Costs for internet, cell use, video meeting or app platforms	\$450 x 4 cultural brokers for cell/internet stipends  \$400 for tech platforms (i.e.zoom)	\$2,200
Language Needs	Costs to access language line for interpreting / translating needs	\$8,000 for about 50 hours of language interpreting or translation support  \$4,000 for graphic design of materials in other languages	\$12,000
<b>Total Amount:</b>			<b>\$166,000</b>

## LESSONS LEARNED

We have learned over the past 13 years that cultural brokers are often community members and school or hospital professionals. By merging the frameworks and theories that undergird the cultural brokering initiative -- Parent to Parent support, cultural brokering from health care, and intersectionality -- culturally & linguistically diverse families of children with disabilities and special health care needs are in a unique position to support other parents in breaking isolation, bringing awareness and knowledge of the education, health and disability service systems, and helping to reduce stress and anxiety because they also understand what it is like to live within two cultures, the original culture from their home country and the new culture of the host country.

We have also learned that cultural brokers play an important role in educating the community on cultural considerations and in making connections to important agencies with whom culturally & linguistically diverse families need connections. To do both of these roles well, we recommend a solid job description for cultural brokers, training to support the knowledge and skills needed to perform their job, and funding to cover costs of interpreting and translating services as well as graphic design for materials in preferred formats.

The Parent to Parent model is based on matches that facilitate a sense of ‘perceived sameness.’ Traditionally, the research looked for markers such as family composition, community of residence, and diagnosis of the child



to make successful matches. When we focused on boosting our support for culturally & linguistically diverse families of children with disabilities and special healthcare needs, we realized it could be tokenizing to have one African American cultural broker, one Hispanic cultural broker, etc. At the same time, we needed to start somewhere to learn how to improve culturally responsive family support. We are still fine tuning the role of a cultural broker and the role of a volunteer family navigator who themselves identify as culturally & linguistically diverse.

## NEXT STEPS

We have support from current funders to continue to cover the effort of the cultural brokers. We have added a focus on building family resilience as part of the practice of cultural brokering. This new family resiliency work required over 4 months spent with bi-weekly meetings to understand from cultural brokers how resiliency is defined and embraced (if at all) in their culture. From there, we selected a model that fits our cultural brokering family to family support model and are in the process of identifying gaps in their current skills so we can provide micro skill training for specific competencies related to communicating about, and modeling, resilience. We will conduct a small research study using pre-post resilience assessments with families referred for cultural brokering support and refine the training for cultural brokers as needed.

## APPENDIX

Appendix 1: References

Appendix 2: Sample Cultural Broker Job Description

### Appendix 1: References

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## Appendix 2: Sample Cultural Broker Job Description

### Cultural Broker for XX Communities

#### BACKGROUND

The Partnership for People with Disabilities (PPD) at Virginia Commonwealth University celebrates over 35 years as Virginia's University Center for Excellence in Developmental Disabilities Research, Training and Dissemination ([www.partnership.vcu.edu](http://www.partnership.vcu.edu)).

The Partnership believes that families are best served by other families, especially those with similar experiences and challenges. Families are the experts on their own children and can pass this expertise to others. To this end, The Partnership's Center for Family Involvement (CFI) ([www.centerforfamilyinvolvement.org](http://www.centerforfamilyinvolvement.org)) works with families 1:1 to build their skills as advocates for their child/family, mentors to other families, and leaders in changing the system for those that follow.

#### GENERAL JOB DESCRIPTION



The Cultural Broker is a part-time grant funded position, reporting to the Director of the Center for Family Involvement (CFI) at the Partnership for People with Disabilities (PPD). Cultural brokers are specific to immigrant, refugee, and/or racially and ethnically diverse populations who work together with other CFI staff and volunteer *Family Navigators* to help culturally and linguistically diverse family members of children and adults with disabilities (aged 0-30) to identify and find information, services, community supports that meet their needs.

Cultural brokers also outreach to organizations and groups in Virginia (and the country) with whom the CFI and Partnership should partner with to meet the needs of diverse families with children and young adults with disabilities.

## **PRINCIPAL DUTIES AND RESPONSIBILITIES**

### **Community Relations**

- Does community mapping of cultural/ethnic associations, groups and organizations for the XX community to help the CFI maintain up-to-date information on resources, services, contacts, etc.
- Establishes collaborative relationships with leaders and professionals in the XX community to promote the mission, goals, and services of the CFI and Partnership to the community, including training on disability laws and services for which their child and family may be eligible
- Understands the cultural traditions and beliefs of the XX community and develops and sustains a trusting and supportive relationship with organizations and families in that community

### **Service Navigation**

- Serves as a ‘bridge’ between service providers and XX families of children/young adults with disabilities
- Uses culturally appropriate outreach methods to find and support a minimum of 50 XX Latino families of children/young adults with disabilities each year, including but not limited to learning about their needs, providing emotional support, educating them on the disability system, and helping them locate and access the resources they need
- Identifies and recruits up to 5 XX families of children young adults with disabilities to volunteer as “Family Navigators to provide peer support to diverse families
- Actively participates in a support group for XX families of children with disabilities co-facilitated by the CFI
- Maintains up to date information on professional and family support in the CFIs Salesforce data system
- Identifies gaps in services as well as conflicts that may arise between services providers and families, and reports issues and resolutions to the CFI Director

### **Organization Support**

- Attends and participates as a team member in regular CFI and Partnership staff meetings/trainings, including any regional meetings with other CFI staff.
- Serves as a resource to the CFI and Partnership by bringing cultural perspectives, training, and technical assistance to ensure the delivery of culturally sensitive and appropriate services to organizational clients
- Assists, develops and participates in programs or projects assigned by the supervisor to ensure the integration of cultural components or perspectives to these programs

### **Professional Development**

- Attends mandatory Partnership, CFI and/or VCU employee orientation and on-going staff development opportunities.
- Participates in at least three face to face or virtual training, seminars or courses and at least one state conference every year to improve service knowledge and skills



- Actively participates in Cultural Broker team discussions (4 times/year) by sharing experiences, training information, resources, etc. with other team members and identifying gaps in services and possible solutions
- Meets at least one time per month with the CFI director

### **QUALIFICATIONS AND SKILLS**

- Have a minimum of 2 years experience with supporting children/young adult with developmental disabilities or special health care needs and their families. Personal or familial experience with disabilities is preferred.
- Have at least 2 years direct experience working with the XX community, and be very familiar with the culture of the community. Being a native member of that diverse community is preferred.
- Through oral and written communication exhibit strong cultural sensitivity, cultural awareness and cultural agility
- Have a good working knowledge of disability service delivery system, local multicultural/ethnic associations, groups and organizations, and other disability service providers.
- Practice effective collaboration, emotional intelligence, and teaming skills
- Be self-directed, self-motivated, organized and able to multi-task.
- Have good computer skills (experienced in using current technology to communicate and prepare materials, including website navigation and data entry).

### **COMMITMENT**

The CFI Cultural Broker is a part-time, classified and grant funded position. Cultural Brokers work up to 20 hours per week and receive 50% of an annual salary of \$42,000+. The position will be renewed each year dependent upon performance and funding.

Cultural Brokers receive mileage reimbursement according to CFI policies; a small wireless monthly stipend; and some equipment (i.e., laptop, ipad, printer if necessary) to meet job requirements.

The Cultural Broker can choose to work out of the main office or from their home.

