



## Resource Sharing Project

### Rural Training & Technical Assistance

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# Supporting Multilingual and Bicultural Rural Advocates

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**R**ural dual/multi-service advocacy programs that are able to provide culturally and linguistically appropriate services to sexual violence survivors make services for all rural survivors more inclusive and accessible. However, advocacy programs often struggle to find, hire, and retain multilingual and bicultural rural advocates. This is why it is important to understand who these advocates are, where they come from, and how we can create a supportive work environment for them.



Being multilingual and bicultural is a wonderful asset which can come with personal and career satisfactions. Having the ability to speak several languages and be sensitive to other cultures gives many opportunities and can open doors to success. One such opportunity is the ability to connect with other members of the community and be a resource for those in need. Dual/multi-service advocacy agencies across the nation employ multilingual and bicultural advocates to support sexual violence survivors in rural communities. A multilingual advocate is someone who can understand and speak more than one language. Often, multilingual advocates are bicultural as well. A bicultural advocate is someone who balances the

cultural attitudes and customs of two countries or ethnic groups, usually someone who has moved to the United States from another country or someone whose parents moved to the United States from another country. Multilingual and bicultural rural sexual assault advocates are able to provide culturally appropriate outreach and services to immigrant and refugee survivors, connect survivors with other helpful services providers and communicate with survivors who do not speak English as their primary language or at all. We recognize there are rural communities in the United States and territories where English is a foreign language, however this paper is intended for advocacy agencies and coalitions in predominantly English-speaking communities.

Immigrants and refugees in rural areas form small and close-knit social networks that multilingual and bicultural advocates often live and work in. Multilingual and bicultural advocates face the same struggles immigrant and refugee survivors face: lack of confidentiality or anonymity, lack of cultural appropriate services, language barriers, limited monetary resources, a change in culture, and conflicts with their beliefs and practices in contrast to the cultural norms of the United States. Multilingual and bicultural

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advocates are human. What happens when they face personal difficulties? Where do they find culturally sensitive support? How much support can they receive from their agency? The following are suggestions for how agencies can support multilingual and bicultural rural advocates.

Multilingual and bicultural advocates come from many countries all over the world, including the United States. Native advocates from tribes across the United States are often bicultural and multilingual, having grown up with both the dominant US culture and their own tribe's culture. Multilingual and bicultural advocates might come from Spanish speaking countries around the Caribbean and Central and South America, Asia and Pacific Islands, the Middle East, Eastern Europe, and Africa.

Some multilingual and bicultural advocates were born in the United States but their parents, grandparents, or great grandparents emigrated from these countries. Others immigrated to the U.S. themselves; they are often known as first-generation immigrants. The information and ideas in this paper are based on first-generation multilingual and bicultural rural advocates. These advocates are the most likely to feel isolated and struggle with adapting to the culture and norms of the United States.

The reality of working with sexual violence survivors in rural areas is that advocates have a heavy workload. Rural advocates travel long distances to reach survivors, complete grant reports and paperwork, provide outreach, attend community meetings, staff the crisis line, and manage volunteers. Multilingual and bicultural rural advocates have this same heavy workload, plus the added work of translating brochures and publicity, interpreting for survivors in a variety of settings, making appointments with other service providers, providing transportation, and helping survivors find childcare, food, housing, and job opportunities. Many of these responsibilities are services we offer all survivors, however these services often require extra time and effort when working with immigrant and refugee survivors. Working with specific communities requires extra duties, talents, non-traditional office hours, longer time required to provide the service, and innovate and creative practices.

## **Language Barriers**

Leaders should be aware of the English comprehension and writing level of multilingual and bicultural advocates on staff. Never make assumptions about how much staff do or don't understand, and regularly

check in about comprehension. We all know how hard it is to tell an employer that we don't know what's going on, or that we need more context provided to understand a discussion. It's also easy to forget that oftentimes, multilingual advocates—like new employees—may not feel comfortable bringing this up. That is why it is so important for leadership to be proactive in regularly assessing its staff's needs. Be clear with the message you want to send in staff meetings and one-on-one supervision meetings. Avoid fast conversations and the use of slang during important conversations because misunderstanding even one word can confuse the meaning. Always clarify the use of jargon, slang, or abbreviations during conversations. Whenever possible, provide English interpretation for important meetings, conferences, or celebrations. Interpretation ensures that everyone can fully participate

in the meeting and that we get the benefit of everyone's wisdom. Ask multilingual and bicultural advocates if they need additional assistance to understand or complete assignments.

One of the basic ways leaders can support multilingual staff is to contract outside services for translation to reduce staff workload. Translating brochures, business cards, flyers, and other material for the agency takes a lot of time and is a specialized skill, no matter the fluency of the advocate. Building a line in the budget for professional translations of materials will avoid adding translation to staff duties. Professional translators, with guidance from the multilingual advocate, also have the resources and experience to know exactly which words would be best for your audience.





Recognize and celebrate the privilege of having different languages and cultures represented on staff. Include the opinions and ideas of multilingual and bicultural advocates in staff meetings, celebrations, and work related conversations. If English is not their primary language, it may take more time to understand them but the ideas and expertise they possess is worth the extra effort.

## **Discrimination**

Multilingual and bicultural advocates face discrimination every day in our rural communities. It often takes longer for them to gain trust and respect within their own agencies and with other service providers in the community. Leaders should be aware of the discrimination, oppression and other barriers advocates face. Help them grow by supporting training and professional development opportunities to increase their confidence to take on a leadership role. Create open communication and validate the effort staff puts in regardless of outcome.

Create policies and practices which address oppression, discrimination, and privilege. Provide training for all staff on cultural humility and allyship in order to increase staff capacity and understanding. First, this will model support and empathy for multilingual and bicultural rural advocates and survivors. Second, it will teach staff basic knowledge on how to provide cultural appropriate services for when multilingual and bicultural staff are out of the office. All staff should share responsibilities and use translation services when multilingual and bicultural advocates are out of the office.

## **Vicarious Trauma and Self Care**

Each of our cultural backgrounds and experiences influence how we cope with vicarious trauma. Multilingual and bicultural first generation advocates are closely connected with their own cultural traditions, beliefs, customs, and social norms. Multilingual and bicultural advocates respect the desires and rights of survivors, but that doesn't mean they don't struggle with their personal convictions when supporting and giving options to survivors. Be aware of cultural norms regarding issues such as abortion, contraceptives methods, drug use, eating disorders, family separation, or female genital cutting. During orientation, training, and supervision, provide opportunities for all staff to talk about how personal convictions intersect with advocacy and the values that guide our agency's work. It's equally important to know the traditions, beliefs, and social norms from their background that provide new avenues for advocacy and healing for vicarious trauma.

Many times, multilingual and bicultural advocates end up feeling isolated when dealing with the vicarious trauma. For multilingual and bicultural advocates, vicarious trauma often deeply intersects with their perspective on life. Not being able to discuss and problem-solve with peers creates further isolation and fear of being criticized or losing their job. Fear of not being understood by coworkers creates personal distance among staff and makes it difficult for multilingual and bicultural advocates to alleviate vicarious trauma with peers. It is important for multilingual and bicultural advocates to understand that they can safely speak with leadership about the differences in their culture norms, the heavy workload, and vicarious trauma without putting their

job security in jeopardy. In addition, we all need to be able to work through emotions in our native language. Talking about vicarious trauma is hard enough without having to translate your own thoughts. Seek linguistically appropriate supports for multilingual advocates; this may include contracting a local counselor or working with your state/territory coalition to find support for staff.

Make it a priority to discuss self-care with multilingual and bicultural staff. Try creating self-care plans with all advocates and discuss the ways the agency can support these plans and provide organizational support and care for employees. Encourage staff to stick to their self-care plans and make sure they are able to use sick and vacation time. If your agency only has one multilingual advocate, she might feel extra pressure to not take time off. In this case, it can be helpful to create a plan for service provision in her absence ahead of time to reassure her and the other staff. Recognize and validate the important work multilingual and bicultural advocates do by sending encouraging messages, leaving encouraging notes, and mentioning accomplishments at staff meetings. This will motivate advocates and recognize their efforts.

Leaders should create policies which allow multilingual and bicultural advocates the opportunity to engage with other multilingual and bicultural advocates on a state or national level. Build a line in the budget to send them to trainings, conferences, and events where they can network, build skills, and create community specific to their multilingual/bicultural work.

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## **Confidentiality**

Confidentiality is one the biggest struggles rural multilingual and bicultural advocates face. They are well known in their communities and with other service providers. Often multilingual and bicultural advocates represent an image that survivors can look up to for their own success. The community often puts pressure on advocates to have the perfect life and to never have personal trouble of their own. The reality of living in rural areas means they attend the same churches, visit the same stores, and use the same services like doctor's offices, police stations, courthouses, and mental health services. Limited social settings mean all community members attend the same community events, eat in the same restaurants, and have children attending the same schools. All these factors contribute to the isolation that many advocates often experience.

In rural settings, delivering meaningful services means multilingual and bicultural advocates must play several roles. Multilingual and bicultural advocates often find themselves acting as interpreters, receptionists, and



researchers, along with providing advocacy. For example, a survivor who has healthcare needs faces barriers if they do not have a social security number, an immigration card, or a state ID. Advocates assisting survivors with these challenges may need to find extra resources to assist. They may have to create innovative resources from scratch or translate any documents and resources that may already exist from your agency or another service provider. The lack of interpretation resources in rural communities is often the reason these advocates must provide so many additional services along with advocacy. This is why it is important that all staff members have a clear understanding of multilingual and bicultural advocates' roles, ethics and healthy boundaries, and outside interpretation services.

All staff should feel confident asking for help from coworkers when they face conflicts of interest, safety issues, or unhealthy boundaries when serving a survivor. Often what stops multilingual and bicultural advocates from reaching out for support is a fear of being shamed or judged for not being able to serve a survivor. It is crucial that all staff members are trained on ethics and how to work with interpreters and language lines so that all staff can assist with the immediate needs of survivors.

### **Limited Culturally Appropriate Services**

In rural areas, multilingual and bicultural rural advocates struggle to find culturally appropriate services for themselves. There are very few culturally appropriate therapists, counselors, or advocates to access. Multilingual and bicultural advocates need



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to be able to use their primary language to express their emotions and to heal from vicarious trauma. Being able to debrief and have safe conversations related to adapting to the culture and norms of the United States is very important for multilingual and bicultural advocates. These advocates need to have an outlet to discuss their culture and perspective on the world without fear of being dismissed or suspected of not doing their job well.

As a part of work, allow multilingual and bicultural advocates to be part of social justice movements, community teams, listserves, and social media networks addressing issues for people of color. Helpful listservs and organizations include:

**Arte Sana** <http://www.arte-sana.com/>

**National Organization of Asian Pacific Islanders Ending Sexual Violence**

**(NAPIESV)** <http://www.napiesv.org/>

**Multilingual Access Forum**

<http://www.nsvrc.org/vocabularyf9/forum/479>

**ALAS (National Latino Alliance Against Sexual Violence)** <http://www.dvalianza.org/other-resources/sexual-violence.html>

## Modify Existing Policies

Many advocates have found that immigrant and refugee survivors have more complex needs that take more time and resources than that of non-immigrant survivors. Oftentimes, standard models of service provision do not meet the cultural needs of immigrant and refugee survivors. Multilingual and bicultural advocates create innovative

practices to meet these cultural needs, and can become overwhelmed in the process without support. Examples include offering transportation to appointments, meeting with clients in non-traditional spaces, working non-traditional hours, and using activities or groups that are not specifically addressing sexual violence in order to gain the trust of community members. The work multilingual and bicultural advocates do often requires a lot of time spent building relationships with culturally specific communities. This takes a lot of time and effort and has large rewards for awareness and access to services. Yet it is often work that goes unrecognized or under-supported by mainstream organizations. Multilingual and bicultural rural advocates need support from their agencies to consider these practices as a normal part of their work. Leaders should find practical ways to balance the extra work hours these activities and services require and approve flexible work hours when needed. It is also helpful for agencies to review their policies and protocols to institutionalize these innovative practices.

## Job Descriptions and Titles

An advocate's job description and title advertises their role within the agency and highlights skills they possess to delivery services. Multilingual and bicultural advocate job descriptions often require them to have the specific knowledge and skills for providing culturally sensitive services. This often includes speaking other languages than English or having a specific cultural background. Survivors identify a multilingual

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advocate title as a signifier of a commitment to assisting survivors with a variety of advocacy needs. Leadership should publicly recognize the complex work and extra skills of multilingual and bicultural advocates through job descriptions, titles, and compensation. This tells survivors, the community, and other staff of this important work. It is crucial that the entire staff understand the complex nature of the work done by multilingual and bicultural advocates so they can be supportive. For the healing of sexual violence survivors it is crucial for leadership to support the emotional health of multilingual and bicultural advocates by encouraging staff to be supportive. The unique work of multilingual and bicultural advocates is essential for multilingual and bicultural survivors and requires unique talents and titles.

## **Finding Staff and Volunteers**

Finding and hiring multilingual and bicultural advocates requires us to think creatively. Leadership may need to revisit the qualifications and requirements for multilingual and bicultural advocate positions. Make sure to welcome a diversity of life experiences and expertise, not just education requirements, to find high-quality advocates. Reach out to community leaders, faith-based organizations, schools that offer English as a foreign language, and survivors from the same community to find applicants.

Building a sustainable and culturally inclusive volunteer program is a great way to ensure we

don’t overextend multilingual and bicultural advocates and that our volunteer pool reflects the whole community. We don’t necessarily need all volunteers to speak English, so consider offering volunteer trainings in the native language of the community. Another great option is using the promotora style of volunteer training. A promotora is a Latino community member who receives specialized training about your services in order to educate their community. This differs from other types of volunteers because promotoras don’t have any formal role within the agency and fulfill no requirements such as volunteering a certain number of times a month. It is important to understand that engaging the community as volunteers in a culturally relevant manner means a non-clinical approach. A promotora is anyone who is interested in being educated on a specific topic and wants to pass the information on to their community in different settings. These are informal settings with their family, co-workers, friends or neighbors. Promotoras are able to engage with other community members in a genuine way. Promotoras may not need to be officially integrated as an agency volunteer, but will continue to pass along information about services when it comes up in conversation in their community.

## **Coalition Support**

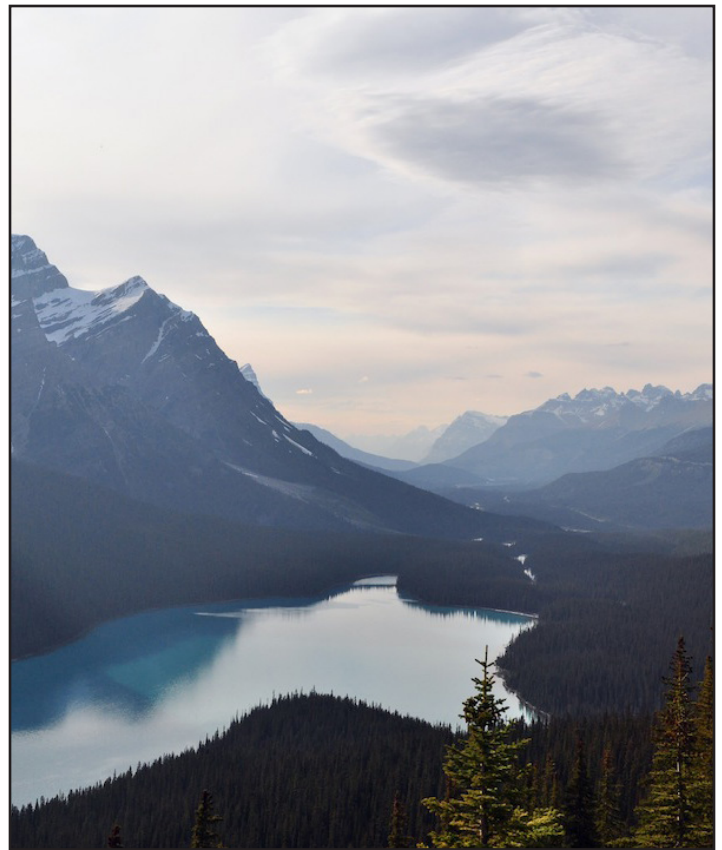
While there is so much we can do as mainstream programs to support multilingual and bicultural advocates, it’s also important for state/territory coalitions to connect



advocates and provide additional support. Some ways state/territory sexual assault coalitions can support multilingual and bicultural advocates working in programs across the state include:

- Provide one-on-one culturally specific technical assistance and materials to the member programs in your state.
- Research curricula that can be adapted for language and culture and implemented without extra work of translation for multilingual and bicultural advocates, or curricula that have been developed for specific cultures.
- Connect advocates across your state/territory with national resources such as national alliances and organizations, listservs, and social media.
- Start culturally inclusive conversations on vicarious trauma.
- Provide regular bilingual or monolingual training opportunities in languages other than English for member program advocates.

Consider facilitating and promoting statewide networks for people of color and multilingual advocates. For example, the Iowa Coalition Against Sexual Assault (IowaCASA) has created and supported ANDI (Action Network for Diversity and Inclusive). ANDI provides a safe space for advocates all over Iowa to address institutional or community issues related to diversity, develop leadership skills, and address social justice issues. Coalitions can also facilitate a get together for multilingual and bicultural advocates, where they can network, share histories and backgrounds, and create a safe space to debrief and practice self-care. Make sure to offer scholarships so as to fully support as many advocates as possible to attend.



Your coalition can provide innovative trainings for multilingual and bi-cultural advocates. Annually, IowaCASA hosts a Dual Roles training for all advocates around the state on the dual roles of multilingual and bicultural rural advocates. This training addresses work with legal and medical systems, certified interpreters, the nature of multilingual advocates' work, ethics, and self-care.

Ensure that multilingual and bicultural advocates in your state have access to continuing education in the form of trainings, webinars, and conferences. Make sure that interpretation and translation is available for all training opportunities offered by your coalition. Even when advocates have a high degree of fluency in English, learning will likely be better in their native language. Consistently offering and promoting interpretation and translation for trainings encourages programs to ask for all accommodations that help best train their staff. For training opportunities not

provided by your coalition, offer scholarships so multilingual and bicultural advocates are able to attend. Be sure to create and provide training on cultural humility and how it translates to services, privilege and oppression, and leadership for all advocates across the state/territory.

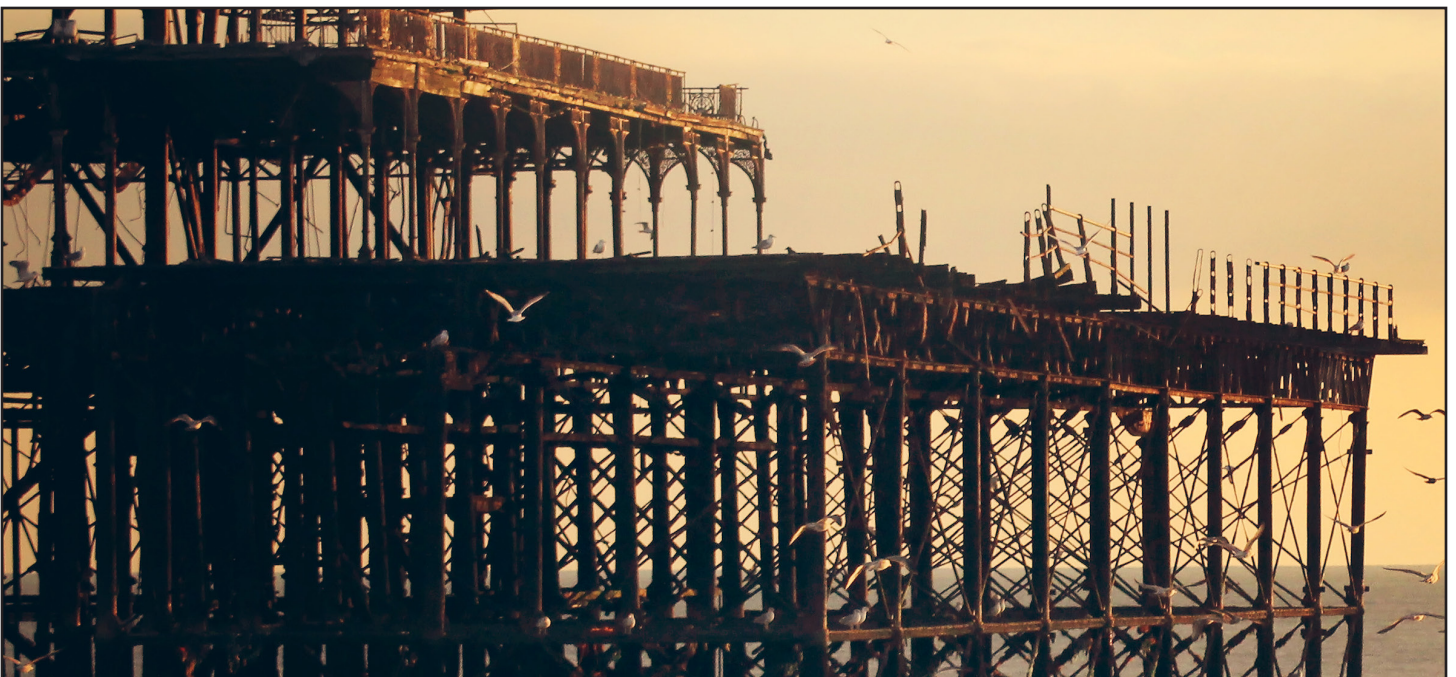
Multilingual and bicultural rural advocates need confidential and supportive spaces to be heard without fear of being penalized or losing their jobs. Often times multilingual and bicultural advocates do not fully understand the support and resources they are entitled to get from coalitions. Create open conversations

with advocates around your state to let them know you are a safe and confidential resource to access.

Create a reading club for coalition staff and advocates around the state to read books and materials on a variety of issues. Then meet up with the entire group in person or online to discuss understanding of the materials and concepts. For example, you can use a reading club to increase knowledge and facilitate open conversations about gender roles and violence against women in the United States versus other cultures or parts of the world.

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Having multilingual and bicultural staff working at our programs brings diversity of ideas and perspectives to our work as well as creates culturally inclusive services for sexual violence survivors. However, we won't be able to keep these staff if we do not support them and provide them with consistent supervise. Continuously looking for opportunities to unburden their workload, providing them with peer level support, and allowing them to creatively assist survivors in our rural communities will cultivate a healthy and effective staff.



## Resources

NSVRC's Multilingual Access Project Advisory Council

<http://www.nsvrc.org/projects/multilingual-access/acceso-multilinguistico>

Preventing sexual violence in Latin@ Communities: A National Needs Assessment

(English) [http://www.nsvrc.org/sites/default/files/publications\\_nsvrc\\_assessments\\_latina-needs-assessment\\_0.pdf](http://www.nsvrc.org/sites/default/files/publications_nsvrc_assessments_latina-needs-assessment_0.pdf)

(Spanish) [http://www.nsvrc.org/sites/default/files/publications\\_nsvrc\\_assessments\\_latina-estudio-necesidades.pdf](http://www.nsvrc.org/sites/default/files/publications_nsvrc_assessments_latina-estudio-necesidades.pdf)

How Can My Organization Create Accessible Materials in Alternate Languages?

<http://news.vawnet.org/2012/12/materials-alternate-languages/>

**The Rural Training and Technical Assistance Project**, a program of the Resource Sharing Project, is available to OVW Rural Grantees that are dual/multi-service advocacy agencies or sexual assault coalitions. The rural team provides webinars, publications, tools, national conferences, training and technical assistance for dual and multi-service agencies seeking to enhance services to all sexual violence survivors. For more information and resources, visit <http://www.resource-sharingproject.org/rural-dual-and-multi-service>.

*This project was supported by Grant No. 2008-TA-AX-K043 awarded by the Office on Violence Against Women, U.S. Department of Justice. The opinions, findings, conclusions, and recommendations expressed in this publication are those of the author and do not necessarily reflect the views of the Department of Justice, Office on Violence Against Women.*

