

recruiting bilingual staff

This tip sheet can help guide you through the process of recruiting people who can perform their work duties in English and another language. Formulating the most appropriate approach to this for your organisation will be influenced by whether you are primarily recruiting for a position that works with a specific community in a language other than English (LOTE), or a position where the LOTE is an additional skill.

Can I recruit people based on language skills?

Yes. The *Equal Opportunity Act 1995 SECT 19* states "An employer may limit the offering of employment to people with a particular attribute in relation to the provision of services for the promotion of the welfare or advancement of people with the same attribute, if those services can be provided most effectively by people with that attribute." The range of attributes includes gender, language and cultural background.

Advertising for bilingual staff

Once the position description has been finalised (advice on undertaking this can be found in the CEH report *Bilingual staff research project* and the CEH tip sheet *Effectively managing bilingual staff*), it is important to develop a targeted promotion strategy to ensure you attract the most suitable applicants. Possible considerations include:

Preparing advertisements

Some suggestions for wording that may be used in advertising for bilingual staff in mainstream media include:

- Persons who speak XYZ language are encouraged to apply
- The ability to speak XYZ language as well as English is desirable / essential
- Bilingual applicants are encouraged to apply.

Identify the types of language skills required for the role; i.e. speaking, listening, writing and reading. Also consider including a statement that your organisation is an equal opportunity employer.

Mainstream media

If the position requires a high level of English language proficiency and literacy then conventional means of advertising could be used. You may consider presenting the advertisement in the sought after LOTE to attract the attention of relevant language speakers.

Ethnic media

Many ethnic communities have their own media networks which can include newspapers, email, radio, television programs and the internet.

Word-of-mouth

In some communities the most effective way to reach potential applicants (especially in smaller and newly emerging communities), is through word-of-mouth. This can be done through attending information sessions and community events, and visiting community organisations.

Existing networks and key institutions

Consider using organisations that engage with people from the relevant communities such as Adult Multicultural Education Service (AMES), English language schools, TAFE English as a second language departments, migrant resource centres, ethno-specific organisations and religious institutions to assist you to promote the vacant position. You can also advertise in school newsletters, through informal networks, other organisations or related sector information bulletins.

The job application and interview process

The conventional job application and interview processes may be unfamiliar to people who have experienced different work cultures. Possible strategies to ensure such applicants have the opportunity to present effectively include providing applicants with guidelines regarding how to prepare a resume, address key selection criteria, fill in an application, and what to expect from an interview.

Consider conducting an information session for potential candidates to:

- assist applicants to better understand the position and the organisation;
- enable the organisation to meet potential applicants and learn about the pool of applicants; and
- assist applicants to prepare the written application, if one is required.

For certain roles you could be flexible in how applicants can respond to the advertisement and consider an alternative to written applications, such as a verbal application.

Conducting the interview

Different cultural communication styles can influence the capacity of an applicant to respond during an interview. Consider consulting with somebody from the same community about the structure of the interview and the type of questions.

Assessing language skills

It is important to conduct a language assessment of the LOTE and/or English skills. Before doing this decide which language skills you need to assess. To assess language capacity consider including a person that speaks the same language on the panel.

Supporting your new bilingual employee

All new staff members require support to settle into their new position. When recruiting for LOTE skills, consider there may need to be additional support for English language proficiency and literacy, and a period of acculturation to an Australian workplace.

More information can be found in the CEH report [Bilingual staff research project](#) and the CEH tip sheet [Effectively managing bilingual staff](#).

Further information

The Centre for Culture, Ethnicity & Health conducts language services policy workshops. Visit www.ceh.org.au to view our training calendar or book a workshop for your organisation.