An In-Depth Guide to
Implementation

This guide expands on the summary framework, providing practical steps, considerations, and examples for organisations wanting to establish a successful Bicultural Worker Program.

While the information is contextual to a legal setting, non-legal services may find significant overlap in the principles and model. Every service, however, must consider their individual context and communities when applying the framework. The professional standards training from cohealth is foundational in embedding these principles across the organisation.

1.
The Guiding Principles
in Practice

Community-Led

This goes beyond simple consultation:

Needs Analysis

Consult with community members before writing the job description to understand their priorities.

Steering Committee

Establishing a project steering committee that includes paid community representatives who have decision-making power.

Continuous Feedback

Building informal mechanisms for the Bicultural Worker and community members to provide ongoing feedback that shapes the program's direction.

Strengths-Based

To value lived experience as expertise:

Rethink Recruitment

Write job descriptions that list "deep knowledge of the [X] community" and "fluency in [Y language]" as essential criteria, on par with formal qualifications.

Remunerate Fairly

Pay Bicultural Workers a professional wage that reflects their unique expertise, rather than a junior administrative or volunteer rate.

Empower Autonomy

Trust your Bicultural Workers to know the best way to engage their community. Give them the autonomy to design outreach strategies and community legal education (CLE) sessions that are culturally appropriate.

Culturally Safe Practice

To ensure a person-centred approach:

For the Client

This means offering a service where they see themselves reflected. It involves greeting them in their language where appropriate, understanding cultural nuances, and ensuring they feel heard without judgment.

For the Worker

The organisation must protect the worker from becoming the "sole cultural consultant" for all staff. It involves providing access to confidential debriefing, ensuring their workload is manageable, and training all staff on cultural humility and safety. It also means that the organisation also needs to be 'on boarded' to the bicultural worker program.

Empowerment-Focused

The measure of success is community capability, not dependency.

The Legal Empowerment Cycle

This cycle should be kept in mind when designing the program, where communities are given the opportunity to know, use, and shape the law.

Ethical and Boundaried

This is a challenging principle and requires proactive management.

Dual Relationships

Bicultural Workers will likely have pre-existing relationships within their community. The CLC needs a clear conflict-of-interest policy and a supervision structure where these can be discussed openly and managed safely.

Setting Boundaries

Provide explicit training and role-playing on how to say "no" and manage community expectations (e.g., requests for help outside of work hours). The organisation must publicly support these boundaries.

2.
The Core Model in Detail

Underpinning this model are the importance of client consent, confidentiality and a clear understanding of the BCWs role.

2.1 EDUCATE: Beyond the Brochure

The education function is about making the law accessible and relevant.

Co-designing Content

The Bicultural Worker should work with community members to decide on CLE topics and their framing. Instead of a generic "Tenancy 101," the topic might be "How to get your landlord to fix things" or "What to do if you get a notice to vacate."

Culturally Appropriate Formats

Formal lectures are not effective. Finding the appropriate format and timing is essential. Working closely with other existing programs, like a men's shed or women's group, often work. Providing information in informal settings also works very well. For example, many of the education pieces happen in foyers or corridors of a community centre, where BCW come across community members and discuss issues.

PRACTICAL EXAMPLE	**For a workshop on fines,** the Bicultural Worker creates visual aids showing the different coloured enforcement notices and translates key terms into a glossary.

2.2 NAVIGATE: The Warm Handover

The navigation role is about building a trusted pathway to support services and ultimately, justice.

The First Conversation

This is more than a data entry or intake point. It's an opportunity to build rapport, listen to the client's story in their own language, and identify legal and non-legal issues (e.g., social support, housing stress) that need addressing.

The Warm Referral

Instead of just providing a phone number, the Bicultural Worker might help the client write down their key points before calling another service, or, with client consent, send an introductory email to the new service explaining the situation.

The 'provider network'

Understanding and expanding the local services that a client can access is fundamental in being able to support a client navigate the justice and social services system. BCW should have access to this wider 'provider network' ideally through the support of a manager or social worker.

PRACTICAL EXAMPLE

A client discloses a family violence issue. The Bicultural Worker, in consultation with a supervisor, helps the client connect with the legal team and simultaneously connects a neighbourhood house or women's group to build their social networks. They help prepare the client for what to expect in their first legal appointment.

2.3 ADVOCATE: The Systemic Lens

The advocacy role connects individual experiences to broader change.

Individual Advocacy

With the support of a supervisor, BCW can support individual clients with 'one-off' or 'light-touch' tasks like accessing utility relief grants or locating fines on a website. This must be something to build towards slowly and carefully, in conversations with the legal team and the BCWs themselves.

Systemic Advocacy

This requires a simple but consistent process. The Bicultural Worker should have a template to log recurring issues. For example: "Logged 5 cases this month of clients from Building X reporting mould issues that the housing authority is not addressing." This data becomes a powerful evidence base for law reform submissions or strategic litigation.

Collective Advocacy

BCW are also conduits for clients to access spaces where they can advocate for themselves, like roundtables with state bodies, advisory committees or parliamentary inquiries.

<table>
<tr>
<td>**PRACTICAL EXAMPLE**</td>
<td>**For the Parliamentary inquiry into the redevelopment of the public housing towers, the BCW were able to point people onto the website to put in their submission but also collect stories in different languages.** These stories then formed part of a report authored by MVLS on behalf of the residents. This was provided to the inquiry. MVLS was then invited to give evidence, which we did along with residents who shared their stories with us.</td>
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Notes on the model:

This is a model that can be flexible and doesn't need to encompass everything we set out here. There will be times when BCW may do more of one thing than another. Or there will be CLCs that are not comfortable or ready to have BCW provide one on one support to clients like accessing utility relief grants. That is fine. What is important is that this model has the potential to do all these things if given the adequate support and resources.

We will also point out that we had many conversations on the 'advocacy' piece of the model. Allowing BCW to provide community members support in accessing utility relief grants, or support in accessing concession rates on their bills meant that we had to work with the legal and social work team on how we would manage information gather, confidentiality and conflicts. These were all issues that we worked through and managed together, in coordination.

3. Step-by-Step Implementation Guide

3.1 Recruitment and Onboarding

Position Description

Clearly state that the role is a blend of community expertise and professional skills. List "lived experience" under essential criteria.

Advertising

Go where the community is: community radio, social media groups, newsletters from cultural organisations, and word-of-mouth through community leaders.

Interview Process

The panel should include a community representative. Ask scenario-based questions like, "A community member you know personally asks you for legal advice at a family BBQ. What do you do?"

Onboarding

Comprehensive organisational induction.
 Focus on who's who, how the CLC works, and critical policies (Confidentiality, Privacy, IT). Set up regular supervision.

Consider providing a work phone.
Many community members may already have BCW phone number, having a work phone can provide some deflection from BCW being called afterhours.

Begin "shadowing."
The worker observes client intake, team meetings, and lawyer appointments to understand the processes and culture. Start foundational legal training modules.

Depending on the role for the BCW, shadowing other parts of the service may be beneficial. Shadowing a social worker can provide more clarity between the difference of a legal issue and a social work issue.

3.2 Training and Mentorship

Training Needs Analysis

Assess the worker's existing skills to tailor the training plan.

Structured Training Plan

Create a schedule for completing core modules (e.g., VLA's Law for Helpers, tenancy training from Tenants Victoria, FV training from Safe and Equal).

The "Reverse Shadowing" Model

After initial shadowing, the Bicultural Worker starts leading part of their core work with a supervisor present. They practice explaining concepts to community members and taking notes. The supervisor is there to support and provide feedback.

It's important to consider what the core work will be for the BCW team. Provide ample opportunities for BCW to reverse shadow community interactions and ask lots of questions. Debriefing after reverse shadowing is vital during this part of the program.

3.3 Management and Sustainable Support (Ongoing)

Supervision

 This is non-negotiable.

Frequency

Weekly, then fortnightly.

Structure

You can use a consistent agenda:
   1) Wellbeing check-in,
   2) Engagement review (managing workload and complexity),
   3) Boundary and ethical issues,
   4) Professional development goals.

Peer Support Network

If possible, connect your worker with Bicultural Workers from other organisations. This network is invaluable for sharing strategies and reducing professional isolation. The Victorian Bicultural Worker Network is an invaluable resource for connecting BCW and accessing peer support.

Vicarious Trauma Management

The work involves hearing difficult stories. The organisation must provide access to an external and confidential Employee Assistance Program (EAP) and actively encourage its use. Sourcing a culturally appropriate EAP service, if possible, would be ideal.

3.4 Organisational Integration (Ongoing)

A Voice at the Table

The Bicultural Worker (and their manager) should be included in team meetings and in strategic planning days. Their insights into community needs are essential for service planning.

Whole-of-Organisation Training

The burden of cultural competency cannot rest on the Bicultural Worker alone. The CLC should invest in ongoing cultural safety and humility training for all staff, including lawyers and management. Again, cohealth's professional standards training is an important resource.

Valuing Insights

Create a formal process for the worker's systemic insights to be heard and actioned by the law reform or advocacy team. This validates their role and ensures their knowledge leads to tangible change.

RESOURCES

Bi-cultural work program - cohealth
Online resources developed by cohealth outlining their program. This page has a great overview of bicultural workers.

Victorian Bicultural Workers Network
This is a sign-up form to be part of the Bicultural Worker Network convened by cohealth.

Inclusive Recruitment copy
A flowchart outlining clear processes needed for an inclusive recruitment process.

Guide to Organizing and Working with Community-based Paralegals [English version] - Grassroots Justice Network
Extensive guide on how to work with community paralegals. This guide is based on international examples on how community-based paralegals support marginalised communities in accessing justice.

I feel empowered, I know my rights: Communities empowered by peer educators and paralegals - Grassroots Justice Network
Victoria based report on the importance of peer educators and paralegals. Published by Victorian Legal Foundation.