



Chapter 5

Introducing ADOPT's Outreach Framework for Vocational Rehabilitation



Getting Started: Outreach to Asian Americans with Disabilities

The primary goal of DRS is to provide effective outreach and vocational rehabilitation (VR) and employment services to people of all ethnicities and backgrounds with disabilities. Currently, however, some sub-ethnic populations of disabled people are not accessing the supportive resources of DRS. Because Asian Americans have been identified as one of these groups, outreach for Asian Americans with disabilities (AAWDs) is a pressing concern for the agency.

The Vocational Rehabilitation Disparity

As mentioned in earlier chapters, the proportion of Asians in Illinois who are being served by the state VR system is less than 1.09% (DRS FY 2005–2010). These numbers are alarmingly low given the large population of Asians in the Chicago area, 4.1% of whom are working-aged and disabled (Erickson, Lee, and von Schrader, 2010). To address this service gap, ADOPT has established a strong network of Chicago-based immigrant and disability groups to support AAWDs who are striving to achieve self-sufficiency, community integration, and a better quality of life.

ADOPT works through partnerships to promote culturally adapted solutions that can help improve access and services for AAWDs in Chicago and, ultimately, the state of Illinois. This toolkit represents one of many efforts ADOPT has made to address the needs and strengths of Chicago-based Asian American job-seekers with disabilities as well as other immigrant groups. Through the creation of this outreach toolkit, ADOPT hopes to improve the capacity of DRS and various pan-Asian American communities to work together to maximize VR access and quality of work opportunities for AAWDs who are ready and willing to work.



Asian Americans with disabilities want to participate in community events and job fairs and are dedicated to finding meaningful work.

Defining Outreach

The key to getting started on a community-based project or initiative is for DRS staff to consider ways to conduct effective outreach. One challenge is that scholarly literature contains no single definition of outreach to underserved or marginalized populations. As a complex process with a variety of theoretical underpinnings, outreach is often used by organizations to locate and communicate with populations of interest in order to realize specific goals. The problem is that, too often, people don't understand how to do outreach (Victor, 2008).

The vast majority of literature focuses on the challenges of outreach, which include lack of culturally appropriate outreach, failure to engage local leaders, lack of needs or asset-based assessments, language and communication barriers, attitudinal barriers, and shortages of individuals from diverse cultures in disability service professions. These findings were reflected in the review by the National Council on Disability (NCD, 2003) of the outreach efforts by nine federal agencies to people with disabilities from diverse cultures. For example, very few federal agencies identify measurable outcomes for outreach to diverse communities of people with disabilities. Instead, these agencies track outreach outcomes by recording the numbers of people who enter systems such as VR.

Reviewing Outreach Options in the Disability Sector

To integrate the wide array of outreach definitions in the literature, the NCD attempted (unsuccessfully) to provide an outreach toolkit to agencies that seek to connect with people with disabilities from diverse cultures. The NCD did, however, scan the available literature and reviewed nine federal agencies' outreach efforts.

Based on this scan, in 2003 the NCD published "Outreach and People with Disabilities from Diverse Cultures: A Review of the Literature," in order to build a knowledge base about outreach to diverse communities of people with disabilities. The report identified some important issues. First, outreach is difficult to study quantitatively because the term has not been operationally defined. Nonetheless, the operational definition of outreach across the studies has some recurrent themes, including value placed on the target population, assessment of needs, advocacy, transformation of social behaviors and attitudes, dissemination of information, and the strengthening of communities.

The literature review also returned a common set of outreach models that are in use with diverse communities; ADOPT has used a combination of these models (listed in the sidebar).

Outreach Models

- Community-based model
- Grassroots model
- Train-the-trainer model
- Peer-to-peer model
- Partnership model
- Support socialization model

In spite of the limitations in the literature and its review of federal agencies, the NCD continues to promote outreach as a viable tool for linking people from diverse cultures with resources on disabilities and states that this is an appropriate intervention for several reasons. First, legislation consistently uses language that supports this method of intervention. Second, major policies that address the needs of people with disabilities also recommend outreach as the preferred method for finding people with disabilities from diverse cultures (NCD, 2003).



**Chicago's Chinatown
1912-2012: 100 Years**

Federal Outreach Mandates

Legislation such as the Government Performance and Results Act of 1993 endorses improvements in federal program effectiveness. Outreach to diverse communities is legislatively mandated by, for example, the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act and the Vocational Rehabilitation Act. Outreach to these communities is not merely a matter of civil rights: lack of resources has negatively affected diverse communities of people with disabilities and has resulted in lawsuits.

As a result, Executive Order 13217 mandates that federal agencies promote community living for people with disabilities and requires agencies to find “alternate or innovative methods of reaching such areas and groups.” This report does not offer specific recommendations for outreach, although its mission was to provide a comprehensive toolkit based on its findings, because operationalizing the word “outreach” was found to be prohibitively difficult. The NCD provided an operational definition for the nine participating federal agencies to follow, but adhering to the definition proved to be too difficult. As a result, the findings were confounded and not generalizable.

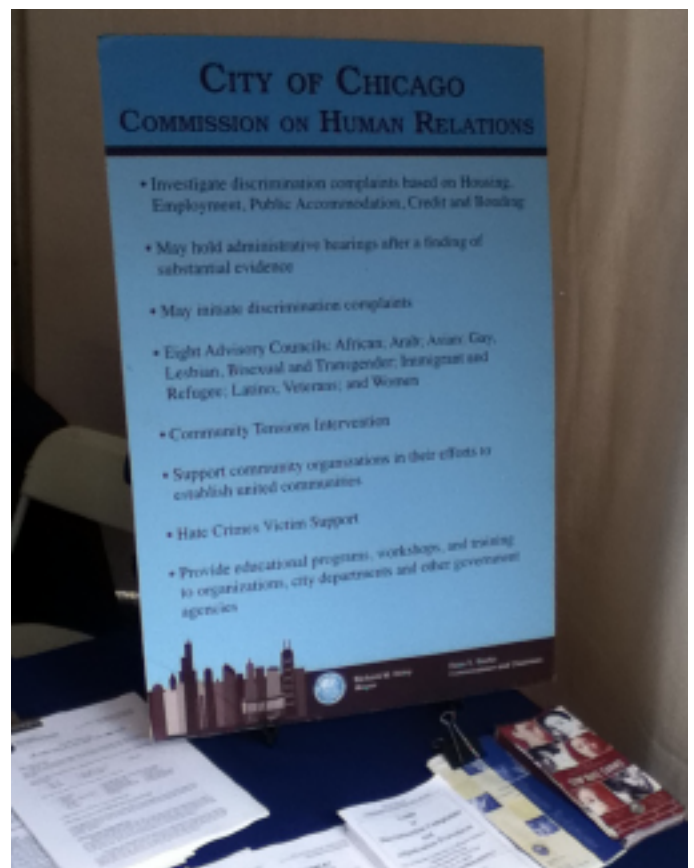
In the wake of this challenge the NCD has recognized that there is strength in the number of definitions of outreach. For example, the NCD states that disability is not a finite term but instead is constructed by the communities in which it is experienced. In terms of pan-Asian American communities, successful outreach requires building trusting relationships.

In this toolkit, we emphasize the need to define disability in a universal way that can increase understanding of its broad-based meanings and implications for service providers, AAWDs, family members, workers, and community leaders. People who have disabilities have the same rights, and should have the same opportunities, as everyone else.

Figure 5.1 shows how ADOPT has developed a comprehensive outreach approach to better engage with AAWDs in Chicago through DRS and key stakeholders.

As we develop outreach programs for different cultures, it will be important to study how each one constructs disability. A culture's view of identity (collective vs. individual) is an important guide for the development of outreach methods. For example, the American value of individualism has led to a legal standard of living in the "least restrictive environment." This term is loaded with cultural values, such as the idea that adult children should move out of the parental home and be self-supporting.

However, other cultures have other ideas about when adult children should leave home. It would be disrespectful to assume that everyone should go out on their own simply to meet the standard of "least restrictive environment" if the cultural expectation is for young people to live with their parents until marriage or some other rite of passage. Instead, the least restrictive standard should be applied in a culturally appropriate manner, taking into account a culture's normative behavior as well as the desires and needs of its members who experience disability, especially in regard to VR.



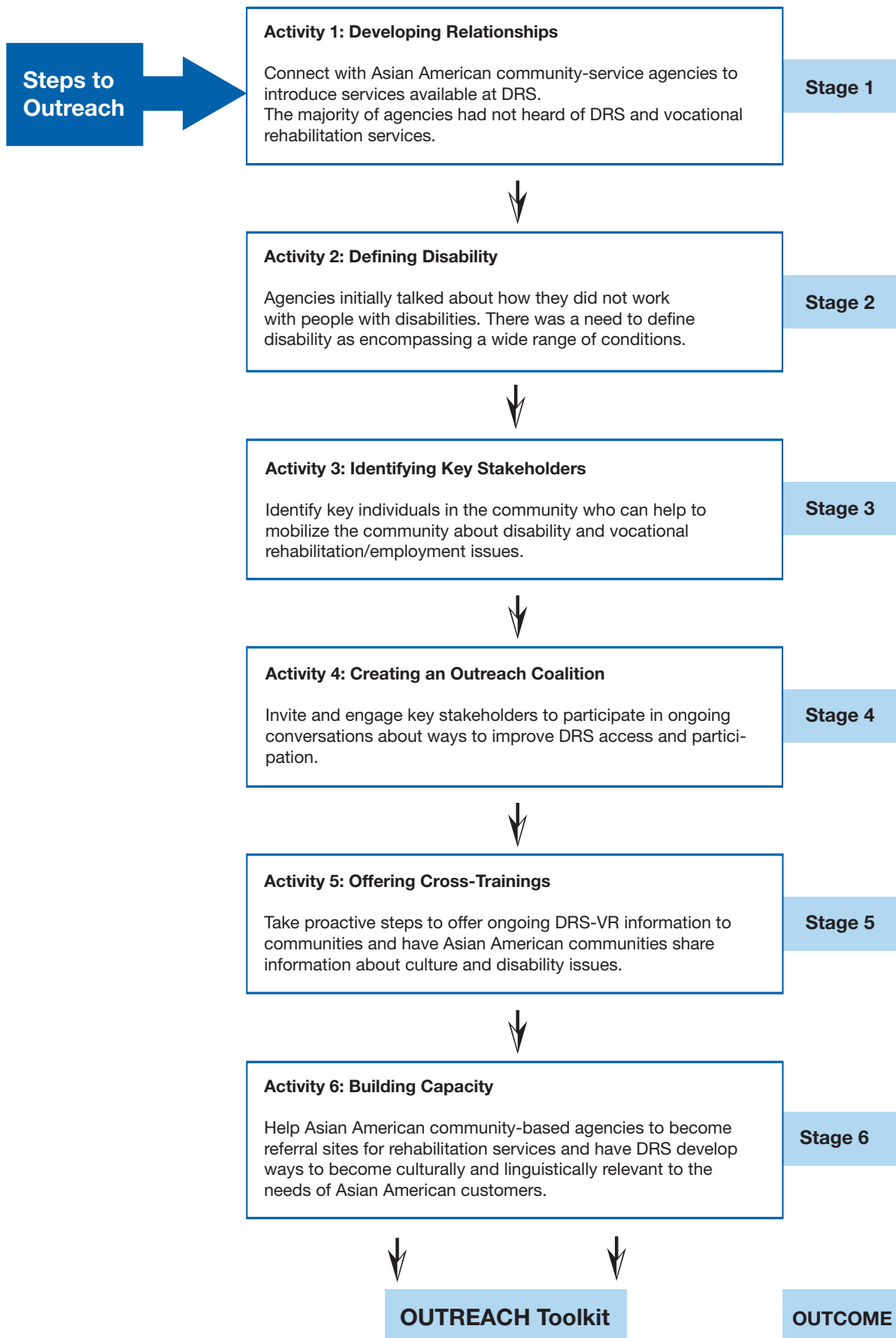
Reaching out to city officials and departments is a great way to introduce systemwide changes.

To successfully define outreach to Asian American communities, stakeholders should pay particular attention to proactive strategies. The 2003 NCD report is an excellent resource as are ADOPT's local efforts and findings.

- Contact key community leaders in the communities, as they are often in touch with people who need help. They can serve as experts to guide us in our assessments of community needs. In addition, the endorsement of community leaders provides the credibility needed to connect with people whose history or cultural values make research difficult.
- For outreach to be culturally appropriate, it must take cultural issues into account as well as the contexts in which cultures are experienced. For example, two people from the same culture of origin who live in different regions of the United States, or who live in different types of neighborhoods (e.g., rural vs. urban), experience their common culture in vastly different ways. It would be inappropriate and negligent to assume that outreach to their two communities would be the same because residents share a culture of origin.
- Comprehensive needs assessments reveal the needs of individuals as well as communities; they should emphasize the importance of respecting and understanding community “needs, capabilities, and readiness.”
- Outreach must be conducted in the language that is most comfortable for the community. As researchers, we cannot assume that because a community communicates well in English, their receptive ability is equally strong.
- It is essential for researchers and service providers to understand community attitudes about research and government. It is also important that researchers feel comfortable exploring and discussing their beliefs about the community with which they will interact (even if they are also members of this community or share its culture of origin).
- It is a good idea for researchers and service providers to have as much familiarity as possible with the culture they are getting involved with. If they are also members of that culture, their innate understanding of its customs and practices will enhance their credibility and acceptance. However, although some clients are more likely to speak openly with someone of their own culture, others may experience more shame in that person's presence.

- Outreach without resources is useless. It is important to compile lists of available, culturally appropriate resources for referrals and to distribute such lists throughout communities.
- The disability system is notoriously fragmented and bureaucratic. It is already difficult for most people to navigate this system; for some, lack of fluency in English can pose an insurmountable barrier. Even if outreach programs are successful, uncoordinated services can still cause system breakdowns. Service coordination through a comprehensive system would be ideal.
- Although client-focused services are recommended for any outreach model, they may be exceptionally instrumental for outreach to particular communities. For example, members of cultures in which mind-body connectedness is a core belief respond well to programs or recommendations that focus on clients' overall quality of life.
- Cultural competence can still be achieved even when it isn't possible to match outreach workers' cultures to the cultures of the communities with which they will work. Comprehensive training and recommendations for workers to interact with a particular culture are invaluable.

Figure 5.1. Developing outreach.



ADOPT'S Approach: Integrating Formal and Informal Support Networks

Keeping in mind the complex roles of formal and informal networks and the complex relationships among them, ADOPT offers a framework for understanding VR and employment outcomes for AAWDs. Specifically, we have adapted the ecological framework described by Bronfenbrenner (1979) and Delgado (1999) as a way to integrate different levels of support and outreach approaches. The ecological perspective recognizes the importance of interactions among domains within and outside the individual's social system (personal, family, and professional networks) and understands that these domains must coordinate in order to make a difference.

Based on this perspective, we suggest that the individual system be viewed as nested within a larger community system that comprises formal as well as informal support systems. Please see Figure 5.2: In the center circle is the working-age AAWD, surrounded by three larger circles that represent three levels of support outside the family (Hasnain, 2001).

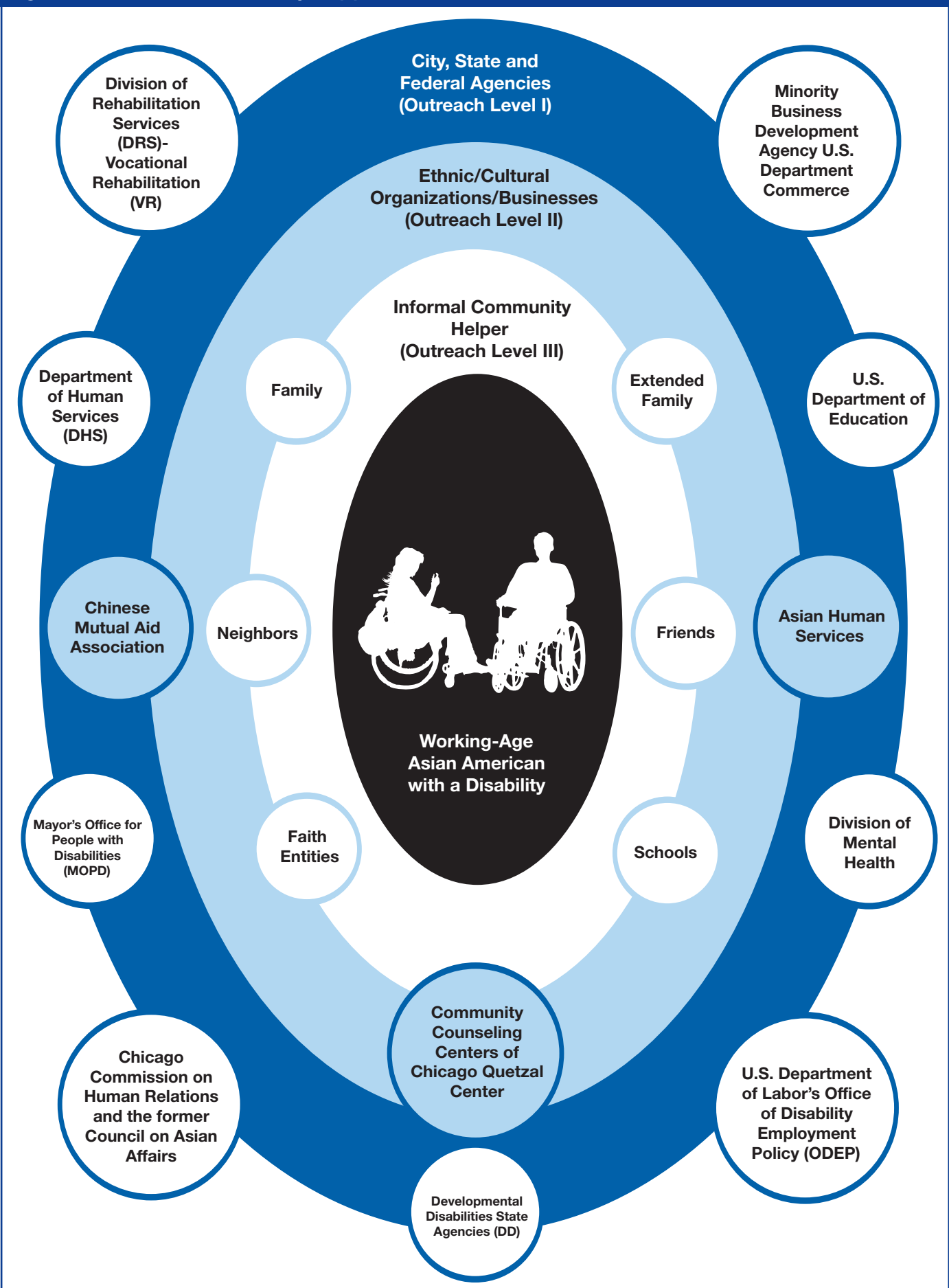
Outreach Level I, the furthest removed from the individual and his or her family, consists of disability- and non-disability-related city, state, and federal agencies and organizations. These formal institutions provide funding and disability services. State agencies such as Developmental Disabilities Council (DDC), the Division of Mental Health (DMH), and the Division of Rehabilitation Services (DRS)'s VR programs are shown as examples of disability-specific agencies that can help to integrate AAWD job-seekers into the workforce. DRS is increasingly contracting with community-service agencies and UIC to address the VR disparity issue and to find ways to increase the meaningful participation of Asian Americans in public service outlets.

Since 2009, DRS has been responsible for coordinating the policy on and delivery of VR services to hard-to-reach populations. Despite a weakened state economy and reduced resources, it remains committed to its primary objective, which is to serve individuals who need help. DRS works closely with people who have a variety of disabilities and has made special efforts to connect Asian Americans to VR programs, given that this group is chronically underserved by the system. Through its various outreach efforts, DRS is committed to increasing the independence of AAWDs and other people with disabilities by providing services that result in competitive employment and reduce reliance on benefit programs.

Outreach Level II includes community-based immigrant and minority agencies that serve as formal institutions within communities. They were developed to assist communities in providing help to their members, including young adults with disabilities and their families. These organizations are generally staffed and managed by individuals who share some characteristics (e.g., ethnicity, socioeconomic status, religion) with target populations. As well-situated grassroots entities, these organizations generally enjoy the trust and goodwill of the communities they serve. They should continue to be sensitive to the cultural issues of these communities, which will help them serve as liaisons between formal and informal support networks.

Outreach Level III consists of nontraditional, informal settings where people congregate for social purposes. These settings provide opportunities for informal conversations and exchanges of concern and advice, thereby minimizing the stigma for those seeking assistance. A member of a religious entity, a neighbor, a teacher of English as a second language, or an elder may assume important “cultural broker” roles within the community at this level, even though he or she is not necessarily affiliated with any formal institutions. In sum, this outreach model provides a way of reaching out to informal and formal resources.

Figure 5.2. Levels of disability support networks.



Formal Support Networks: An Overview of the Current Vocational Rehabilitation Service System

DRS is a state and federal program whose primary goal is to provide VR and employment services to individuals with disabilities, regardless of their ethnicities and backgrounds. DRS is one of five divisions (recently changed from six) in the Illinois Department of Human Services (DHS). Despite its flexibility in determining the amounts and types of services that will be made available, the system is so fragmented that there often may be a lack of coordination among providers of highly specialized services. As a result, many individuals with disabilities, especially Asian Americans and other immigrant and minority groups, often do not receive VR services unless they are informed well enough to use the system to their benefit.

VR is a broad term that includes a variety of specialized resources, disability benefits, and entitlements. DRS offers a wide range of programs and services for people who have disabilities; however, many of these are unknown to the Asian American community.

They include:

- DRS Success: Making It Work Together
- Client Assistance Program (CAP)
- Disability Determination Services
- Educational Services
- Home Services Program
- Services for People Who Are Blind or Visually Impaired
- Services for People Who Are Deaf or Hard of Hearing
- Services for People with Disabilities Who Are Hispanic/Latino
- Vocational Rehabilitation Program
- Work Incentive Planning and Assistance

Although these VR services seem plentiful, few Asian Americans are aware of them and their benefits. Many families do not even know anyone with enough knowledge to advise them about how to access these services. Having no one to turn to impedes their ability to make informed decisions and decreases the likelihood of positive employment or other outcomes.

Limitations of the Current System: A Closer Look

For the most part, Asian Americans seeking VR services from DRS encounter a confusing system fraught with red tape and a host of eligibility requirements, including lengthy applications and eligibility-determination procedures. ADOPT found that Asian Americans rarely considered formal disability services to be a source of support. According to Hasnain and Leung (2010), these barriers result from a variety of bureaucratic and financial factors that may include:

- Inconsistent service delivery patterns and information provided by VR offices
- Excessive paperwork and hard-to-understand jargon
- Differing application procedures and paperwork that must be completed to determine eligibility
- Limited enrollment for programs due to varying fiscal cycles and capacity

A Failed Intervention

DRS requires medical documentation despite an obvious disability. A male Somali refugee who was an amputee spoke five languages and was interested in becoming a trained interpreter. ADOPT connected him to a refugee-serving agency, which was to connect him to DRS so he could sign up for an interpreter training course offered by two local agencies in Chicago.

This man had not been aware of DRS and its ability to support his training and employment needs. He was very excited about the idea of working with such a resource. But he remained unconnected to DRS because he did not attend a follow-up meeting with the service provider.

Later, the case worker explained to ADOPT that the Somali man had refused to see a physician, and therefore his paperwork to qualify for services was incomplete. Eventually, ADOPT discovered that this man had experienced a terrible incident with a physician in Somalia and was therefore afraid to make the appointment (ADOPT field experiences, 2010).

All of these factors contribute to a lack of centralized services that often results in unsatisfactory service. In addition, language and cultural factors often make interactions between Asians with limited English and formal service systems difficult and frustrating. For example, a focus group discussion with service providers of Asian descent and people who serve Asians mentioned “disrespect, disregard, and ignorance” by VR counselors as common systemic barriers. Similarly, AAWDs indicated that the services they receive are often intimidating, embarrassing, frustrating, and demeaning. Please see “A Failed Intervention” for one example.

In this context, it is not hard to imagine how the shortage of ethnically diverse professionals in the disability field impedes the provision of services to people with disabilities who are also members diverse cultural, ethnic, and linguistic backgrounds. These limitations in the VR system can also impede positive outcomes when differences in family values are not recognized. One example is the concept of independence; as discussed earlier, this may mean something very different in Asian cultures than in Anglo-European cultures. In a similar way, culturally differing views on disability may lead an individual to make a decision about services that the service provider may disagree with or many not understand. The sidebar scenario on the next page, "A Positive Intervention," illustrates how DRS can work at its best (Hasnain, 2010).

Two more problems with VR that often lead to poor outcomes are inadequate outreach and follow-up. For example, even when AAWDs are connected to DRS and ready to receive help, they may be disappointed because agency personnel don't know about their cultural patterns or are unresponsive to their family's experiences of poverty, discrimination, and racism. Such difficulties are primarily due to the shortage of bilingual and bicultural Asian VR staff. A 1999 study by the National Council on Disability (NCD) asked 82 U.S. and state rehabilitation agencies about their racial and ethnic makeup; 56 agencies that responded. Of these, 87.4% of the state office staff were identified as Caucasian, 7.7% were African American, 1.9% were Latino, and 2.9% were Asian American or Pacific Islander.

A Positive Intervention

A Korean caseworker shared a story about how she helped a Chinese single mother become a personal care attendant for her son, who has a significant developmental disability. This was a fortunate match because the system did not have a personal care attendant of Chinese descent, which would have been a culturally relevant solution for this family. DRS's proactive response allowed this mother to care for her household while taking care of her son at the same time.

Clearly, the current VR delivery system in Illinois is trying to effectively address the heterogeneity of its population through the ADOPT initiative. This is an improvement from 1996, when Flowers, Edwards, and Pusch found that 58% of the independent living centers they surveyed had no outreach plans or programs for culturally diverse individuals with disabilities and only 20% of their administrative staffs were members of different cultural groups.

The current system, despite its good intentions, remains predominantly grounded in Euro-American values and beliefs. It has not been designed to understand, respect, and address the needs of the families found in racially, ethnically, and culturally diverse communities. For example, Asian American individuals might feel empowered if service providers were to invite grandparents, cousins, and significant others along on VR visits and employment planning.

As a result of ADOPT's efforts, DRS has shifted from a service system that focuses only on the individual with a disability to one that better recognizes and emphasizes the importance of the family and community. In the past, the individual was the center of professional attention, and the family was excluded from the rehabilitative process. ADOPT encourages efforts to include families and communities in all aspects of rehabilitation and treatment.



Asian American activists at an outreach event.

Developing an Effective Vocational Rehabilitation Outreach Model

In the absence of a clear outreach implementation framework and endorsed standards of practice, it is difficult to promote systemic change at the state agency level. In fact, despite many years of focus on outreach in various service sectors and research agendas, there is little evidence that consistent standards and principles of outreach are being widely incorporated in practice (NCD, 2003).

Compared to other helping professions, the disability field is relatively young (Eddey & Robey, 2005), and VR is even younger. The culture of the disability service community has not supported the replication of proven outreach practices. Many funding sources, such as the National Institute for Disability Rehabilitation Research, Administration on Developmental Disabilities, Department of Labor, and the Maternal and Child Health Bureau, must add more culturally adapted approaches in order to replicate proven practices.

No consensus has yet been reached on the following questions:

1. What constitutes outreach?
2. Who is accountable to ensure that outreach is successful?
3. How do service systems and providers measure outreach?
4. Does outreach lead to improved outcomes?



Coordinating community events can lead to opportunities to spread the word about VR services.

As a next step, we recommend that DRS make a clear commitment to putting outreach into practice. Such a commitment must not take the form of mere statements that refer to outreach; they must be backed by senior DRS officials and staff, and resources must be allocated to apply and evaluate outreach initiatives.

Without key change agents and cultural brokers who help link culturally and linguistically diverse customers to DRS, efforts at both community and systemic levels will be difficult to create and sustain at the grassroots level.

At the systems, organizational, and program levels, there must be coordinated plans to support efforts to improve VR access for AAWDs in Illinois. Such plans would have to include strategies to build partnerships and infrastructure and to address workforce diversity, empowerment/self-advocacy, service delivery, data collection, and monitoring/evaluation. This toolkit outlines all of these strategies.

The Need for Outreach Tools and Standards

Although much has been written about outreach, the concept has remained largely theoretical/conceptual. It has not often been implemented in a way that organizations such as DRS can use. Disability professionals do not have adequate guidelines on outreach and preferred practices to help them improve VR access and outcomes for social service systems. Moreover, it is hard to put these definitions into practice only by identifying, observing, or measuring behaviors.

One culturally sensitive approach to building outreach capacity is developing tools to measure outreach, which is a future goal of this ADOPT initiative. The process of building outreach at the system level requires multilevel strategies and involves both top-down and bottom-up grassroots capacity-building.



Access Living is Chicago's largest agency for disability advocacy.

Building on Organizational Supports

The application of outreach involves organizational and systemic changes. These changes are often a function of the policies and guidelines of the agency or system where they are used. A VR provider may have the best intentions to support an Asian American client, but s/he might not succeed unless DRS supports her in engaging with family members, making sure she is accessible when her clients need her, and conducting outreach activities in the community. Crucial support at the organizational and system levels allow the provider to develop culturally adapted outreach and services that can benefit all clients, especially Asian Americans.

Balcazar, Suarez-Balcazar, and Taylor-Ritzler (2009) confirmed the importance of organizational supports for multicultural practice, which has often been overlooked in the literature on outreach. Even when VR providers are aware of diversity issues, the agency's policies may not match the needs of clients from other cultural backgrounds. For instance, VR providers may need a more flexible policy about allowing family members to participate in the VR process.

Other important issues that require systemwide support are making trained interpreters available when needed and translating VR materials into high-priority languages (e.g., creating a VR fact sheet). DRS is already interested in making its current counselor pool more diverse by recruiting and training young Asians from diverse immigrant and refugee communities to enter the field of rehabilitation counseling. The emphasis on organizational support for outreach is well supported in the literature and is consistent with our approach in this toolkit—a citywide, collaborative project. These and many other examples are detailed in other chapters.

Methods for Identifying Effective Strategies for Outreach



Reaching into Chicago's ethnic communities is a sure way to extend outreach.

As part of ADOPT's efforts, we undertook a detailed review of the literature to develop a comprehensive list of the strategies researchers have used to organize outreach efforts.

Overall, these mechanisms provide focus and direction that support outreach implementation efforts. We limited our review to literature on system-level outreach and people with disabilities from diverse cultures (Montalto & Hasnain, 2011).

Appendix E provides a summary of the 10 broad-based approaches of outreach that we believe can collectively or individually help improve VR access to services and supports leading to employment. We used a holistic approach and identified initiatives, projects, and strategies that use some form of outreach to engage with different pan-Asian groups, including native-born, immigrant, and newcomer refugee communities.

Developing the Outreach Framework and Matrix of Strategies and Indicators

The outreach framework we have developed for the toolkit is intended to be comprehensive and relevant to VR professionals and various stakeholders. It is designed to help move the project beyond narrow approaches, toward broad-based, systemic VR practices.

Specifically, we recommend that DRS work with community partners and a project advisory council to identify outputs and outcomes for each strategy that falls under a key principle. Our aim is to bridge the gap between Asian American communities and the state VR system through process-oriented activities, strategies, and capacity-building and to sustain such relationships.

We have identified several strategies across our task forces that are suitable for developing and implementing outreach action plans. We selected broad-based approaches and strategies from published studies, from fieldwork done by ADOPT, and from widely accepted journal articles and reports, which we modified for the VR service sector.

Here, outreach approaches apply to organizational and systems strategies and strategic partnerships that should be in place to help VR providers deliver culturally relevant support and outreach (please see Appendix F for a list of potential strategies).

Chapter 5 References

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Appendix E. - Outreach Strategies

1. Building community collaborations and partnerships
Proactively developing and cultivating grassroots community connections and working in partnership with key stakeholders, including Asian-serving community-based and faith-based organizations and related networks.
2. Strengthening spoken and written language capacity
Delivering services and supports in the preferred Asian language and/or mode of delivery of the sub-ethnic Asian American customer population served.
3. Using ethnic media and marketing to Asian American communities
Engaging in proactive and targeted ethnic media outreach (TV, radio, newspaper) to inform members of underserved communities about their rights and available VR services and supports.
4. Collecting data, research, and evaluation
Conducting ethnic-specific qualitative and quantitative research to measure the effectiveness of various VR outreach and service interventions.
5. Promoting advocacy and empowerment among Asians
Building the capacity of Asian American communities to serve as referral portals and job-placement sites to improve VR outcomes and employment for Asian Americans with disabilities.

6. Incorporating culturally and linguistically relevant VR service delivery and policies

Building in-house support to facilitate the process of achieving cultural and linguistic competency among VR staff to better serve diverse customers.

7. Developing grassroots leadership

Identifying key leaders in the Asian American community that can serve as change agents to promote VR access and employment for Asian Americans with disabilities.

8. Mobilizing coalitions and task forces

Working with key stakeholders from various sectors to help design and implement services and policies that are tailored to the unique needs of Asian American communities.

9. Recruitment policy and workforce diversity policy

Developing policies that help promote the recruitment and hiring of multilingual people to serve as VR counselors, service providers, and managers.

10. Cultural brokering training and professional development

Offering ongoing education and training for VR offices that address culturally and linguistically appropriate outreach and service delivery practices and policies.

Appendix F.

Ten Effective Outreach Strategies

1. Building Community Collaborations and Partnerships

- Identify and develop relationships with local Asian entities such as community-based organizations (CBOs), faith-based organizations (FBOs), and Asian businesses that can help to address disability and VR issues in pan-Asian communities.
- Identify Asian Americans with disabilities (AAWDs) who can be part of advisory boards or committees to help identify key priority areas of need and action.
- Identify key players from CBOs, disability agencies (DAs), and DRS who can help to strengthen VR connections.
- Identify local Asian American businesses/employers and affinity groups who could serve as potential employers for AAWDs.
- Form a coalition of task force committees that focus on consensus-based goals and responsibilities specific to disability and employment
- Identify and utilize events organized by CBOs/FBOs as a means to integrate disability and VR information.
- Cultivate relationships between DRS/DHS and CBOs/FBOs to facilitate outreach to AAWDs.
- Build trust and relationships by participating in community or educational events organized by CBOs and DRS.
- Use businesses, CBOs, or FBOs who have hired someone with a disability as models for the broader business sectors.
- Incorporate family-centered services as a means of showing respect for this value in Asian communities.

2. Strengthening Language Capacity

- Identify existing pools of multilingual Asian interpreters and translators.
- Identify other resources in the Chicago area that may meet language needs.
- Develop a pool of in-house consultants that can act as interpreters or translators.
- Connect and collaborate with state agencies and divisions to develop language access supports.
- Connect and collaborate with Illinois Coalition for Immigrant and Refugee Rights (ICIRR) to use its resources in the VR referral process.
- Identify the languages that DRS needs but does not currently have in its current pool of resources.
- Develop a system to increase the number of trained VR interpreters of Asian languages (e.g., Asian CBO staff helped by CBO or DRS to get certified).
- Develop a listing of innovative language access options and possibilities.
- Subscribe to language interpretation or translation service options (telephone, television) that can be used on the spot.
- Offer stipends for language learning classes to become a trained interpreter for the state.
- Connect to at least one agency specializing in specific sub-Asian communities to help with language needs.
- Ensure that program materials (e.g., brochures, pamphlets, website information) are in at least several common Asian languages, instead of just English and Spanish.
- Target high schools and universities to encourage multilingual, multiethnic students to pursue careers in the counseling and mental health fields.

3. Media Outreach and Marketing to Asian Communities

- Identify Asian media, such as newspapers, blogs, other online forums, radio, and TV.
- Reach out to the Asian populations who use various Asian media venues, such as newspapers, radio, and cable TV (e.g., media who would publish briefs about available VR services and other resources).
- Disseminate information among Asian businesses on the benefits of hiring AAWDs (e.g., tax incentives for employers who hire people with disabilities (PWDs)).
- Invite Asian media to ADOPT/DRS/CBO events so that all parties can inform each other about their activities related to AAWDs.
- Hold public forums about DRS VR services in different Asian neighborhoods and advertise through Asian media.
- Advertise DRS, incentives, and other news in multiple languages on Asian channels.
- When connecting with media, explain how their audience would benefit from the services you offer. They are more likely to air or cover something after having a clear sense of how their audience will gain from it.
- Understand the needs of specific sub-Asian groups, and highlight that aspect of your service or product in marketing. For example, many Asians have traditional collective family values. Products that enhance or support this familial base can be marketed more easily.
- Continue working with media and apprising them of events, as long-term relationships tend to reach a wider base with more meaningful impact.
- Use media resources, such as press releases, to cover Asian business and other events and inform the public of past and future events related to hiring PWDs.
- Disseminate information about PWDs and VR services among CBOs, FBOs, and Asian agencies and communities.

4. Data Collection, Research, and Evaluation

- Develop surveys or interview questions (in multiple languages) to collect baseline data on the concerns and needs of AAWDs in finding employment.
- Develop ethnic-specific data-collection methodologies that are culturally and linguistically appropriate for AAWDs. For example, if a female customer requests a female provider, every effort should be made to fulfill the request.
- Develop tracking mechanisms for the number of PWDs or AAWDs, their needs and concerns as identified by CBOs, and the individuals themselves; the numbers referred; and the numbers followed up, with results.
- Develop strong DRS-CBO-DA partnerships, and track outreach activities that help bridge connections.
- Identify the multilingual resources (services, interpreters, medical/disability professionals) that CBOs, DAs, and DRS have, and develop a database of resources.
- Identify strategies to overcome cultural and linguistic barriers that hinder AAWDs and their families from acknowledging their disabilities, so they can be included in the research surveys and the census.
- Develop a mechanism of information dissemination among the CBOs, DRS, and DAs on past or present research, events, and resources related to AAWDs.
- Avoid collecting data that puts Asians into one ethnic group; differentiate between various groups, such as Chinese, Thai, Laotian, and Vietnamese.
- Observe if certain Asian sub-groups are performing far below or above others. Could this be attributed to outreach initiatives, such as publishing (or not publishing) information in their language? Is your organization attuned to their media outlets?
- Develop survey or interview questions that are jargon-free and simple to interpret or translate.
- When collecting data through surveys, interviews, or focus groups, use a person's native language when possible.
- Identify cultural variances to more appropriately analyze the data.

5. Promoting Advocacy and Empowerment among Asians

- For DRS: Develop and conduct informative sessions for Asian CBOs on DRS services, referral process, documents required, DRS limitations, etc.
- For CBOs and DRS: Co-facilitate the informative sessions for general Asian populations organized by Asian CBOs on DRS services, referral process, documents required, DRS limitations, etc.
- Help the newly empowered AAWDs inform other AAWDs in their community or identify AAWDs in their community that need to be empowered.
- Help AAWDs help themselves. We want to inform them and direct them to resources, but we want to make sure they're motivated to continue the efforts. We want them to educate their community, use the information they learn to ask questions, and connect with DRS/VR and CBOs/FBOs. We don't want to give them a bunch of information and have it end there.
- Identify AAWDs and use them as role models in in-house and outside events or occasions (by CBOs that DRS can "borrow").
- Link Asian populations to VR resources through awareness-raising sessions or campaigns.
- Develop a mechanism to inform Asian Americans, especially youths, about academic and professional courses (e.g., rehabilitation counseling) that train disability professionals.
- Encourage and inform Asian Americans to join disability professions (e.g., higher education tuition support for its entry-level staff).
- ICIRR and other CBOs and DRS should be working with the AAWD community through forums and town hall meetings.
- Actively recruit Asian staff, and encourage teamwork among them as well as integrated activities with other organizations.
- Connect to legal agencies (Department of Justice, Civil Rights Office), and provide referrals as necessary.
- Provide encouraging attitudes, tones, and words in all translated outreach material.
- Use multiple media venues in Asian communities to spread information (e.g., newspapers, TV, radio).

6. Vocational Resource Service Delivery and Policies

- Update intake forms to include language and cultural needs or preferences.
- Identify and document culturally appropriate issues across the major Asian cultures in reference to VR service delivery systems.
- Identify ways to address cultural barriers in sensitive and proactive ways to improve VR customer-counselor interactions.
- Increase cultural competency of DRS officials through awareness-raising/informative sessions about Asians.
- Develop basic information sheets about VR services in major Asian languages on the VR system (e.g., policies, required documents, and processes, with approximate timing).
- Form an in-house resource pool of Asian languages and cultures within DRS and among CBOs.
- Prepare fact sheets explaining the linguistic and cultural issues of AAWDs in the VR referral and job-placement processes.
- Set aside at least one staff member who can (either on a part-time or full-time basis) address cultural competency issues with employees.
- Ensure that cultural and linguistic competence is fully integrated into VR services and policies.

7. Developing Grassroots Leadership

- Identify local leaders in CBOs and the local community and connect them with AAWDs.
- Identify grassroots organizations that may have connections to unidentified AAWDs. Attempt to connect and build relationships with these organizations to bring their leadership perspective to others.
- Train and develop a pool of self-advocates from AAWDs. Create a task force of grassroots leaders along with DRS officials and AAWDs to determine a comprehensive list of goals, actions, and collaborations.
- Use the existing coalition or collaboration of local leaders to utilize available sources for the VR of AAWDs (e.g., potential employers).
- Educate the key staff of CBOs on the DRS and its VR system (e.g., required forms, referral process, and contact points).
- Talk about disability and DRS services at events organized by Asian FBOs and coordinate with the leaders there to spread the information.
- Use these tumultuous economic times to train fast-paced, high-flying interns who can achieve for the company or organization part-time at the present and full-time after graduating.
- Refrain from using standardized tools in promotional decisions; they are often inaccurate and incomplete for those of Asian descent due to cultural differences.
- Actively pursue an affirmative action policy favoring AAWDs as a minority. Understand that the model minority is a myth.
- Offer special training to AAWDs and PWDs.

8. Mobilizing Coalitions

- Identify the existing coalitions active in Asian populations (e.g., chamber of commerce, professional groups such as teachers, workers, artists, media, FBOs).
- Determine common goals of coalitions to serve AAWDs (e.g., identify people in each coalition who are knowledgeable about Asians and AAWDs).
- Identify point people from DRS and the community who will keep coalitions on track.
- Develop a mechanism to bridge the gap between existing coalitions through regular e-communications and, if possible, quarterly meetings.
- Hold periodic events to bring everyone together and identify priority areas; networking is key.
- Explain how the coalitions will benefit their clients with disabilities by making your services and other resources available to them.
- Use personal contacts in reaching out; tossing a name into the mix can often help.
- Work with media and city officials to expose the need for coalitions to act on issues of disability inclusion.

9. Recruitment Policy and Workforce Diversity

- Advocate for affirmative action policies for the recruitment of people with Asian backgrounds, especially in DHS, DRS, and city offices.
- Encourage CBOs, DAs, DRS, and other stakeholders to have a supportive policy on workforce diversity.
- Educate the Asian population on joining disability professions as rehabilitation counselors in CBOs and DRS.
- Educate area businesses on the benefits of hiring PWDs, especially AAWDs.
- Include Asian Americans and disability in your mission statement.
- Make hiring decisions transparent and objective.
- Create mentorships and internships to involve young minds. Perhaps offer specific positions for AAWDs and PWDs. Do not let mentors choose their own protégés. Assign them to those who would not experience this diversity otherwise, and focus on staff development as much as intern development.
- Assign writing tasks on what the mentor learns about other cultures to create moments for reflection.
- Do not focus on changing individuals: Act on the organizational climate and attitude.
- Let mid-level managers, hiring managers, and other leaders exemplify diversity in their speech, thoughts, and actions.
- Design an auditing system that holds people accountable for actions instituted by the department.
- Use commitment to diversity as an evaluation tool at performance reviews.
- Acknowledge the benefit of recognizing diversity and share examples with Asian grassroots entities and businesses.
- Promote awareness and educate Asian American youth about pursuing disability professions in higher education.

10. Conducting Cultural Brokering Training and Professional Development

- Develop in-service and training opportunities with CBO partners on cultural competency related to Asians.
- Train the key VR office staff on culturally competent outreach.
- Train the key CBO staff on DRS “culture” (e.g., terminology used, how the system works, what information DRS officials require).
- Create a document for CBO staff and DRS staff that allows for dialogue between the two before the customer meets with the VR counselor.
- Hold workshops at various VR offices and CBOs focusing on language and culture in the context of DRS.
- Have midlevel managers and face-to-face managers evaluate employees partly on commitment to diversity.
- Have an open mission to diversity and disability that face-to-face managers exemplify.
- If developing a basic curriculum for staff is too difficult, use brochures and information materials from CBOs in educating staff.
- If a bonus system exists, offer bonuses partly based on activities or volunteer work related to disability.
- Inform supervisors and managers of cultural competency training so the initiative continues.