

# Potential Sticking Points: Community Cultural Awareness and Effectiveness

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- Violating important community norms
  
- Demonstrating cultural disrespect
  
- Being arrogant and vocally judgmental about what has gone on before
  
- Failure to earn community trust and respect
  
- Demonstrating extreme disinterest in cultural events, practices, rituals, and ceremonies
  
- Failure to connect and relate to cultural groups different than their own
  
- Inappropriately “speaking for the community” and taking on the role of “insider” when that isn’t the case



# Important Cultural Aspects and Community Resources

List the important cultural aspects that VISTAs need to know and the community resources that can help teach them:

Cultural Information:	Who? What? How?
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What values, practices, relationships, and rituals are important? What people, places, resources, attitudes, knowledge, and behaviors are deemed important?</li> </ul>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• How does the community describe, name, and define itself?</li> </ul>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• How respect is defined and practiced?</li> </ul>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What are the “non-negotiables” of the community? (For every community, there are usually rules that govern one’s conduct regarding relationships and different kinds of resources that are very important to respect and not violate.)</li> </ul>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What is the history of the community—social, spiritual, political, economic, diversity, major successes, major conflicts and struggles, cross-cultural experiences?</li> </ul>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What are the major groups, sectors, and relationships groups have with one another?</li> </ul>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What is the structure of the community? How does the community organize itself?</li> </ul>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Who are the formal and informal leaders - who are viewed as “spokes-people” and the “elder voices” or keepers of wisdom and knowledge?</li> </ul>	

# Important Cultural Aspects and Community Resources (cont.)

Cultural Information:	Who? What? How?
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What are the traditions of service, (how helping others and “volunteering” is understood and lived out within and across this new community)?</li> </ul>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What is the rhythm of a day, week, season, year, and important cycles?</li> </ul>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Who has the credibility within the community and why. How does one achieve credibility with this group?</li> </ul>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What does the community consider being its strengths, assets and legacies?</li> </ul>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What have been the significant cross-cultural, cross-group experiences for the group or community? What impact might they have on future relationships?</li> </ul>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What has the community identified as its priority needs and challenges?</li> </ul>	

# Entering Diverse Communities with Cultural Effectiveness

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A few suggestions for VISTAs about entering a diverse community with cultural effectiveness:

- Practice listening and observing with openness and an ability to suspend assumptions and check personal lenses
- Recruit a cultural guide and coach
- Practice being affirming in the face of differences that challenge your comfort
- Commit to growing your understanding over time
- Commit to learning about the visible as well as the less visible, deeper aspects of every culture
- Understand that questions need to be posed in a culturally respectful manner
- Behave in a trustworthy manner; focus energies on building trust
- Be authentic and transparent about your intentions
- Apologize if you make a mistake
- Wait, ask permission (rather than demand)...
- Understand that negative responses you might receive might be because of prior history and prior offenses not caused by you
- Begin by focusing on the strengths and assets, rather than the challenges and problems
- Learn from your mistakes
- Steer clear of participating in perpetuating “community gossip”

# Guidance for Working with a Cultural Coach or Guide

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- Seek out someone who has credibility across the community
- Seek out someone who is more bi-cultural or multi-cultural so that he or she can translate and interpret things for you so that you can understand things in your terms
- Share your intentions and hopes with your coach
- Discuss with your coach the kinds of feedback that would be helpful for you to receive
- Make sure that this is a 2-way relationship, and that you are not just taking but giving consideration to your coach's needs
- Commit to regular check-in times so that you are being guided with some regularity
- Receive the feedback you are given with an open mind and open heart
- Work hard not to compromise the integrity of your coach within the community
- Share both successes and problems with your coach in a timely fashion
- Where appropriate, ask your coach to help make introductions for you