

Innovative Solutions Support

Project Guide – Bilingual Support

What is Bilingual Support?

Bilingual Support provides language support for children and/or families who do not speak English fluently. This is usually done through the provision of a Bilingual Facilitator who can speak the child's first language and assist educators to communicate with the child and their family. Bilingual Support can also include access to interpreter services and translation of written documents to support communication with a child's family. In most cases Bilingual Support is a short-term form of support while a child settles into a new early childhood setting.

What does a Bilingual Facilitator do?

A Bilingual Facilitator typically works directly with the child and their educators to interpret and to provide security and comfort during the child's transition into the service. They can also help educators to communicate with the child's family members and facilitate information sharing between the service and the family.

In addition to this language support, Bilingual Facilitators also provide insight into the child's culture for educators. This is often done in an informal way as the facilitator and educators work alongside each other.

When is Bilingual Support needed?

Bilingual Support is needed when language differences create a barrier to inclusion. This could be because a child becomes distressed or withdrawn because of their inability to communicate effectively with their peers and educators or because educators are unable to communicate with the child's family members in order to share important information.

Bilingual Support will not be needed in all cases where there are language differences. There may be another educator or family member who can act as an interpreter, or a child may settle happily despite the language difference.

It is important to explain in an application how language and/or communication barriers are impacting on the child and/or their family and how Bilingual Support will help to address this.

Bilingual Support and the Strategic Inclusion Plan

In general, it is expected that a service will have an up to date Strategic Inclusion Plan (SIP), with current Barriers to inclusion identified and Strategies and Actions developed to address the Barriers, in order to apply for Innovative Solutions Support.

However, in the case of urgent applications for Bilingual Support this is not a requirement. In such cases it is expected that, after the assessment and outcome of the application, the service will then develop a SIP. Where an urgent application has been approved without a SIP, any subsequent applications will not be considered until the service has developed their SIP.

How much support is needed?

Bilingual Support is usually short term, typically lasting between 6-12 weeks and providing up to 100 hours of support. However, each application will be different, reflecting the unique circumstances of each child, family and service. In determining the duration, frequency and intensity of support needed you should consider the following factors:

A. Who is the support for?

Is the support primarily needed to support a child? Or is it also about supporting other family members? If communication with family members is important, then the Bilingual Facilitator may need to be available at pick up and drop off times as well as throughout the day. If the support is more focused on the child, then the support hours may be focused on key parts of the day.

B. Attendance patterns

How often a child attends will often make a difference to how quickly they settle into a service. A child who attends full time may need more intensive support initially but will usually settle more quickly than a child who only attends one or two days a week. For example, support for a child attending full time may be needed more intensively but for a shorter number of weeks; for a child attending one day per week the support would only be needed one day per week but potentially for a greater number of weeks.

C. Other barriers

Where other barriers to inclusion are present additional levels of support may be required. For example, children and families who are refugees may face language barriers but also be impacted by the trauma of their experience. It may take longer to build a trusting relationship with the child and family in such circumstances and so Bilingual Support may be needed for a longer period of time than usual.

Applications for Bilingual Support for longer than 12 weeks, or for more than 100 hours of support, will need to provide a rationale for this level of support.

What happens when Bilingual Support ends?

Bilingual Support aims to create a smooth transition into a service for children and families. In most cases this can be achieved in the time frames mentioned above. However, because of the short-term nature of bilingual support, it is important that the service and support educator work together to ensure that the child and family do not become overly dependent on the Bilingual Facilitator's presence and that there is a transition plan to ensure that the support can be successfully removed at the end of the funded period.

This transition plan should be developed by the service, bilingual facilitator/ agency and the service's Inclusion Professional. IPs will be asked to confirm that there is an appropriate transition plan in place when they provide their endorsement for the project application.

For examples of the kind of strategies a transition plan might include see below.

In exceptional circumstances, the service and educators may require further support to facilitate the child's inclusion after the initial period of Bilingual Support ends. This could be because the situation

is a challenging one with multiple barriers to the child and/or family's inclusion or because the child's transition into the service has not happened as quickly as was expected.

In such cases, the service, IP and Bilingual Support provider should discuss what support will be needed once Bilingual Support ends. If the service is unable to meet these needs themselves then they may consider applying for further support. This could be in the form of Additional Educator or Immediate Time Limited Support if there is a need for ongoing short- or long-term support from an additional educator. Alternatively, it could be further Bilingual Support. In such cases the service will need to reapply for Bilingual Support and provide details in response to Question 10 on the application form about why a further period of support is needed. In order to ensure continuity of support the service (and IP) should mark such applications as urgent and endeavor to submit them at least 2 weeks before the end of the initial support period.

Please note that additional funding for further Bilingual Support will only be approved in exceptional circumstances and where there is clear evidence that it is required. It is expected that most Bilingual Support projects will be successful within the initial funded period.

Sustainability of Bilingual Support

One focus of Innovative Solutions Support is enhancing the inclusion capacity of educators so that inclusive practices can be sustained after a project ends.

However, for Bilingual Support this is challenging as it is not reasonable to expect educators to learn to speak another language in 6-12 weeks. While educators will pick up key words and phrases during this time it is highly unlikely that they will be able to communicate fluently with children or family members in their home language. Services should provide opportunities for educators to reflect on and share any insights that they have gained as a result of working with the Bilingual Facilitator, and plan for how this information can be shared and/or utilized in the future, however additional sustainability strategies are not required for Bilingual Support applications.

For other forms of Innovative Solutions Support, projects are usually seen as "one offs" and it is expected that at the conclusion of a project new knowledge and practices will be embedded into service operations. Repeat applications for the same or similar projects are therefore unlikely to be approved.

However, for the reasons outlined above, subsequent applications for Bilingual Support *for different children* facing the same language barriers will be considered, as will additional applications for the same child/ren in exceptional circumstances.

What if more support is needed to work with children and families from particular cultural backgrounds?

Bilingual Support is usually focused on supporting specific children and their families to transition into a service. Where a service identifies a broader lack of cultural understanding amongst educators as a barrier to inclusion, they may seek to access Cultural Mentoring Support to improve educators' awareness and understanding of a particular culture.

Cultural Mentoring is different to Bilingual Support in that it aims to develop educators' cultural responsiveness in a more formal way, for example, through organized professional development

sessions or team meetings. It has a focus on building staff understanding and knowledge rather than on directly supporting an individual child and their family.

Sometimes a service may identify that they need both Bilingual and Cultural Mentoring Support. In these cases, they should use the Cultural Mentoring Support application form and check yes when asked if their project will also contain Bilingual Support.

If a service is unsure whether their application is for Bilingual or Cultural Mentoring Support, they should speak to their Inclusion Professional for guidance.

Bilingual Support Transition Plan

Sample Strategies

When implementing Bilingual Support, services should develop a Transition Plan to ensure a smooth transition when that support ends and to avoid creating dependence on the Bilingual Facilitator. The following strategies may be useful to consider when developing a Bilingual Support Transition Plan.

- **Taper Support Over Time**

Consider gradually decreasing the level of Bilingual Support over time. Support may commence at a more intensive level for the first weeks of a project before tapering off. This helps to gradually reduce reliance on the Bilingual Facilitator over the course of the project and also enables educators to further develop their own relationships with the child/ren as the Bilingual Facilitators involvement reduces.

- **Identify a Secondary Attachment Figure**

Identify a key educator to work closely with the Bilingual Facilitator and the child/ren. While the child/ren may initially (and understandably) develop a close bond with the Bilingual Facilitator (due to their shared language and culture) the involvement of the key educator will enable that bond to be transferred over time. For the child/ren the association of the key educator with the Bilingual Facilitator helps to build a sense of trust and over time allows the educator to build a stronger bond with the child as the Bilingual Facilitator's involvement decreases.

- **Build Peer Relationships**

Plan for the Bilingual Facilitator to support the team of educators to build peer to peer relationships. The Bilingual Facilitator can help the child to successfully engage in experiences with others and begin to build peer relationships. Such relationships are often the key to a child's successful transition into a new environment. Having friends to play with reduces anxiety and distress and also helps to reduce dependence on adults for a sense of security. The sense of belonging that comes from being an accepted member of the group is valuable in its own right but also reduces the likelihood of long-term dependence on the Bilingual Facilitator.

- **Establish a Routine**

A calm and predictable routine helps to provide a sense of security for all children. This is particularly important for children requiring Bilingual Support. A predictable routine allows children to predict what will happen next and to feel a greater sense of control over their day. This is particularly helpful when they do not yet have the English language skills to understand verbal cues or directions. Familiar routines and rituals (such as looking at a book with a parent before they leave or waving goodbye from a particular spot each day) can also help to minimise distress at drop off time. Once children are familiar with the routine the Bilingual Facilitator can take a reduced role in helping to guide them through the day.

- **Introduce Visual Cues**

Visual cues are an effective way to support the establishment of a predictable routine. They are particularly helpful while children are developing their English language skills. The Bilingual Facilitator and educators can develop visual cues for key parts of the day (if they are not already in use) and support the child/ren to understand what they mean. Again, as understanding develops, the Bilingual Facilitator can reduce their direct involvement in supporting the child's participation and allow educators to do this with the aid of the visual cues.