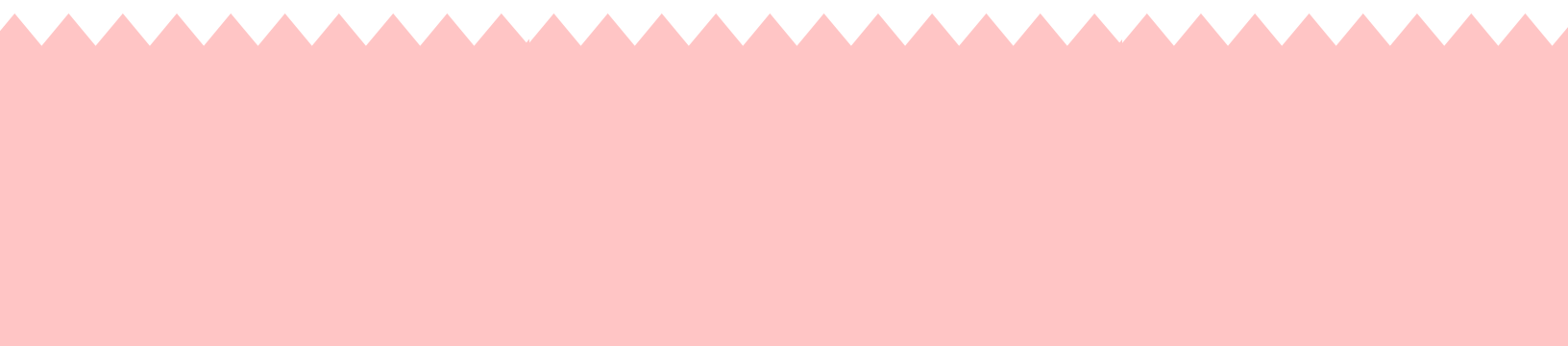




Engaging Multilingual Communities and English Language Learners in U.S. Libraries

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INTRODUCTION

- Did you know that in the United States over 67 million people speak a different language rather than English at home? (Center for Immigration Studies, 2018, retrieved from <https://cis.org/Report/673-Million-United-States-Spoke-Foreign-Language-Home-2018>)
- How should libraries engage multilingual communities and learners?
- What are the best practices for English language and foreign languages programming?

OVERVIEW

This guide is designed to support library personnel who serve multilingual patrons through events, collections, and enrichment opportunities.



“FACTS ABOUT THE MULTILINGUAL COMMUNITIES IN THE UNITED STATES”



Four most commonly spoken languages in the U.S. other than English:

- Spanish
- Chinese
- Tagalog
- Vietnamese

Houston
50%

Phoenix
38%



Residents speaking languages other than English in the U.S. five largest cities:

New York City
49%

Los Angeles
59%

Chicago
36%



The **United States** is one of the most culturally, economically, climatically, racially, linguistically, ethnically, and religiously diverse countries in the world.

SOURCE: US CENSUS BUREAU, 2019; STATISTA

5 REASONS TO ENGAGE WITH MULTILINGUAL SPEAKERS AND ENGLISH LANGUAGE LEARNERS

- Promotes lifelong learning and social inclusion
- Increases cultural literacy and cultural awareness among library patrons and workers alike
- Recognize the value and contributions of each group
- Bridges a gap between libraries and community groups
- Encourages use of library spaces as multicultural community centers

COMMON MISCONCEPTIONS

MYTH: Immigrants have low educational attainment.

TRUTH: Immigrants are just as likely as the U.S.-born to have a bachelor's degree or more (32% and 33%, respectively) (PEW Research Center, 2020). Educational attainment varies among the nation's immigrant groups. However, in total 75.6% of the Foreign-Born population 25 years and over are at least high school graduates (Census, 2020).

<https://www.census.gov/data/tables/2018/demo/foreign-born/cps-2018.html>

MYTH: Immigrants do not know English.

TRUTH: Based on the American Community Surveys data (2019), only 8% of the Foreign-Born population speak English less than "Very Well."

<https://data.census.gov/cedsci/table?q=Foreign%20Born&tid=ACSDP1Y2019.DP02>

MYTH: Speaking multiple languages disrupts learning and development.

TRUTH: In addition to facilitating cross-cultural communication, it is well researched and documented that bilingualism and multilingualism positively affect cognitive abilities. Let's all learn at least one other language!

<https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC3583091/>

MYTH: English is the national language of the U.S.

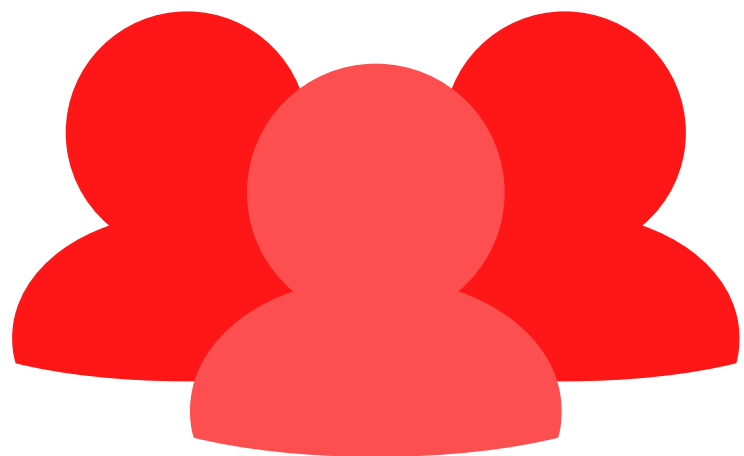
TRUTH: The US has no official national language, but English has acquired official status in 32 of the 50 states. Hawaiian is an official language in the state of Hawaii, and 20 indigenous languages are official in Alaska

<https://www.cia.gov/the-world-factbook/countries/united-states/>

TOP 10 RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Hire bilingual library staff. Recruit bilingual volunteers. Make a list of library staff members who speak other languages.
2. Make sure your body language is open and attentive. Listen and ask questions.
3. Don't make assumptions about what they may know about libraries and lending policies and what they may need. Honor the choice of each individual, communicate in their language of preference.
4. Display "Welcome" signs, library activities, and materials information in the languages spoken in your community.
5. Provide library application forms and orientation materials in your library users' native languages. Always have templates of key resources that label the information items both in English and the other language(s). Consider a "What language do you speak?" flyer labeled in English and other languages to help identify which materials the person needs.

Recommendations for Serving Speakers of Languages Other than English in U.S. Public Libraries



BEGIN BY...

- Staff Equipping: Recruit to reflect your community.
 - Staff and volunteers that know the cultures and speak the languages of the community are a key part of creating a welcoming environment.
- Partnerships & Politics and The Collection: Find your local immigrant community groups.
 - Talk to members to include them in the planning process and to establish their information, collection, and service needs - surveys and focus groups can be useful tools!
- Program & Service Design: Meet them where they are.
 - Outreach and mobile services can help alleviate library deserts and build connections.
 - Make sure your hours work for your whole community. Consider adding virtual access points for off-hours.
- Language Access and Marketing: Prepare inclusive signage and forms in the various languages of your community.
 - Think about ways to connect with patrons - using the community to help with language barriers or tools.
 - Many first-time visitors are unfamiliar with library services; policies should help them feel welcome at the library with a clear understanding of available support.

TOP 10 RECOMMENDATIONS

6. Utilize available technology tools to improve communication: Google Translate, phone language access services, etc. Ensure your staff is properly trained to use them.
7. Ensure your technical services team classifies and tags materials appropriately. Learn how to retrieve all language materials and resources at your library – what search terms to use in your public access computer (PAC), e.g., SUBJECT: Chinese Language Materials, Bilingual Spanish, etc.
8. Know the important dates, holidays and festivals celebrated in your community. Create displays to acknowledge and commemorate these. Create programming that represents your community. Collaborate with your local heritage organizations.
9. Get to know local community newspapers and ethnic media. They can provide free newspapers and translate and publish your events and services to share with their readers.
10. Contact your federal, state, local municipal, and social service agencies; ask for printed multilingual information materials for public distribution. Locate online resources offering multilingual information, such as the Internal Revenue Service, Bureau of Motor Vehicles, and have them available at your Library or link to it on your website.

PROGRAM POSSIBILITIES: SUCCESSFUL PROGRAMS FOR NEW AMERICANS

Libraries across the country are providing English language classes, foreign language classes, citizenship clinics, cultural programs and festivals, and staff teams or committees to ensure programs, services and collections are accessible to new Americans.

KEY ELEMENTS OF SERVICES TO MULTILINGUAL COMMUNITIES



SOURCE: HOUSTON PUBLIC LIBRARY, INTERNATIONAL SERVICES, 2021

Examples of Programs, Services, and More for the Community:

Emprende Mujer

*Prince George's County Memorial Library System
Largo, Maryland*

In partnership with El Poder de Ser Mujer (<http://elpoderdesermujer.org/>), the PGCMLS provided four workshops on entrepreneurship in Spanish for women. The sessions included topics on social media, personal and leadership empowerment, business plans, how to start a business, certifications for minorities, customer service, and marketing. The program serves Spanish speakers, mostly women and a few men who are looking to start or improve their business.

“Libraries hold a special place in society, it has the power to integrate newcomers and serve them with compassion. Open your eyes, see beyond and embrace the different cultures and languages.”

English Language Learners (ELLs) Excel! Participate, Connect, Discover

*Alachua County Library District
Gainesville, Florida*

In 2019, the Alachua County Library District received a \$10,000 American Dream Literacy Initiative grant to enrich its award-winning Conversational English Program for adult English Language Learners at the Tower Road Branch Library. Services included “Literacy Through the Arts” programming, such as drama and dance, “Celebrate! Words to Live By” Art Show, Train the Trainer sessions, Collaborating With Strangers Workshops, technology, textbooks, workbooks, an oral history collection, ESOL Club, TALK TIME events, as well as social mixers designed to meet the growing demand of English Language Learners. Currently, the library offers a series of virtual live programs, such as an international Conversation Club, and a Coach’s Roundtable for volunteers.

English Reading Hour

Milwaukee Public Library

Milwaukee, Wisconsin

Milwaukee Public Library created its Refugee and Immigrant Services Committee to address the growing need for refugee and immigrant programs and services. One result of this was the creation of English Reading Hour, their first ESL program series. Designed to help ESL and ELL students with reading comprehension and conversation, the program focuses on poems and short stories to help learners improve their understanding of the English language. Starting as an in-person program, ERH pivoted to a virtual program which allowed learners from across the United States and internationally to join. The program currently has students regularly attending from the US, Dominican Republic, and Mexico.

"For many newcomers, the library is a safe, non-judgmental and widely recommended first place to come and learn English. Many of our participants have been in Canada less than three months (even during the Pandemic). For many people, this is the only opportunity they have to practice English."

Homework Help

Broad Rock Library

Richmond, Virginia

Broad Rock Library serves a significant population of families who are first- and second-generation immigrants from Mexico, Central America, and West Africa. Most of the children speak at least some English, but many of their parents don't. This leaves the kids stuck when they have trouble with their homework or reading. It also means that the parents often don't understand what's happening at school as much as they would like to. In an effort to address these problems, Broad Rock Library created Homework Help. An unexpected benefit of the Homework Help program was the parent network that was developed. For safety reasons, we required the parents and caregivers to stay with their children, and while they waited, they talked. They shared insights and experiences and built a network of relationships that continue to extend beyond the library and schools.

Mementos from Home

Denver Public Library

Denver, Colorado

Mementos from Home is an audio-visual exhibit created by the Cultural Inclusivity Services Department of the Denver Public Library. Staff and customers came together at the Rodolfo "Corky" Gonzales Branch Library to tell a story about the objects that mean the most to them. This program aims to increase the visual and audio representation of the populations we serve. It also gives our participants an opportunity to share their stories. Participants are photographed with their memento and invited to record their stories in their language. The photographs are printed and distributed as part of a traveling exhibit and displayed at different Denver Public Library branches.

<https://www.denverlibrary.org/ci/mementos-home>

“By identifying and responding to the needs of non-English speaking individuals, we support the development of respectful communities in which people have the tools to find and create opportunities to fulfill their dreams and participate fully as citizens.”

Naturalization Ceremony

Pikes Peak Library District

Colorado Springs, Colorado

Pikes Peak Library District has worked with the U.S. Customs and Immigration Services (USCIS) Denver field office to host naturalization ceremonies since 2012. PPLD host locations include East Library, Library 21c, and Penrose Library. This collaboration provides a more convenient location for naturalized citizens living in Southern Colorado. Local media coverage and community support highlight the contributions immigrants make throughout Colorado. The Colorado Secretary of State sends a representative to conduct new voter registration. Local organizations such as the Women’s League of Voters, the Kinnikinnik Chapter, the National Society of the Daughters of the American Revolution, and the America the Beautiful Chorus have attended to celebrate new citizens.

*Participants engaging in
a conversational
English program at Alachua
County Library District*

Photo credit Alachua County Library District



Una Voz

Richland Library

Columbia, South Carolina

Richland Library created Una Voz during the pandemic as an extension of services to the Hispanic/ LatinX community in Richland County, South Carolina. It was one of many groups impacted when the library made the unprecedented decision to close its buildings on March 16, 2020. Since then, Una Voz has found new and creative ways to connect with local residents and offer resources to address their needs through a dedicated Facebook page. Thanks to partnerships with Richland School Districts One and Two, the library organized virtual and on-site opportunities to serve ESOL/ ESL families safely at several of its locations. To provide equitable access to career services, the library offered translation services in Spanish to job seekers, and in an effort to feature local entrepreneurs, the library generated its first bilingual cookbook, titled Que Rico. Ultimately, the project led to a Que Rico mini-series, which shines a spotlight on food businesses in Columbia. Episodes, containing two to three-minute video clips, were key to learning directly from local businesses, creating new cultural experiences, and sharing international cuisine.

Project Welcome

Broward County Library

Fort Lauderdale, Florida

The Project Welcome program is designed to promote the library’s resources and support customers on their path towards literacy, economic prosperity, and a sense of belonging by using Amazon Echo devices in libraries. The initiative targeted participants are those in the largest non-English-speaking communities in Broward County—Spanish, Haitian Creole, and Portuguese families. Project Welcome is described in two parts: Engaging (welcoming and attracting newcomers to the library) and Transitioning (offering mentoring and a series of programming). During the Engaging part, the library offers its marketing materials and other resources, such as a welcome video, in multiple languages. To supplement printed and video materials, library staffers have dedicated tablets that can translate languages. For the Transitioning part, the Welcome Ambassador program provides volunteer mentors for people who have just moved to Broward County. The Transitioning part also features English and citizenship classes. Both are supported by the voice technology of the Echo to help bridge language barriers as library staffers can ask Alexa to translate words and phrases into the necessary language.

<https://bit.ly/3A7ziLi>

“I feel that this event was a prime example of community development in a town which has members from all over the world. We became tied together in that moment by two things that I very much enjoy, food and music. In between my enchantment with the vast array of colorful dishes and the light playing of Koto wafting through the air, I was given the opportunity to meet a family who hails from both Tamil Nadu, India and Romania. All of us were equally entranced by the interactions and activities unfolding before our eyes, while for nearly 2 hours I was given tales of wonderful experiences, ranging from learning dialects in Indian Schools to growing up in the Carpathian mountain side.”

Welcome to America Team

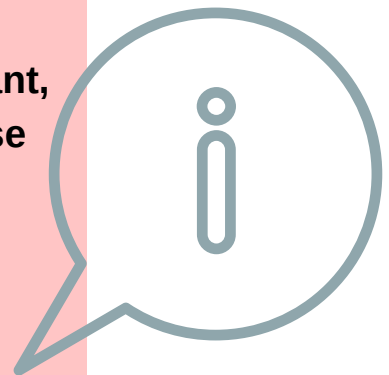
Pima County Public Library

Tucson, Arizona

Pima County Public Library supports the work of a number of affinity teams dedicated to ensuring representation and outreach to communities who are traditionally underserved or underrepresented, both in library services and staffing. The PCPL Welcome to America team works to ensure library programs are accessible for immigrants, both recent and established, as well as those who work in the wider network of immigrant services. This includes case managers, state refugee resettlement staff, and library staff on the front lines of public services. The team vision was defined as supporting a diverse community that recognizes, welcomes, and celebrates immigrants for their contributions to our shared success. Based on this vision, our team's mission is to accomplish this by providing streamlined, equitable access to programs and services across PCPL and the community. The PCPL website has a page dedicated to this mission and creating a space where information relevant to the needs of these groups is aggregated and organized for ease of use: <https://www.library.pima.gov/welcometoamerica/>

For additional libraries doing great work for the immigrant, refugee, and new Americans community, check out these locations too:

- Calgary Public Library: <https://calgarylibrary.ca/>
- Carnegie Library of Pittsburgh:
<https://www.carnegielibrary.org/welcome/>
- Piscataway Public Library: <https://piscatawaylibrary.org/>



Resources

ALA STATEMENTS AND RESEARCH

ALA Resolution in Support of Immigrants Rights (2007):

<https://www.ala.org/news/news/pressreleases2007/february2007/irr07>

ALA Resolution in Support of Immigrants' Rights to Free Public Library Access (2005):

<https://bit.ly/3xu71wF>

Beyond Broken Borders: Examining Library Services to Latino & Spanish Speaking Populations in New Latino South States with Anit-Immigration Laws (2012):

<https://www.ala.org/awardsgrants/beyond-broken-borders-examining-library-services-latino-spanish-speaking-populations-new-latino>

COLLECTION RESOURCES

Día Children's Day/Book Day: <http://dia.ala.org/>

ALSC: <https://bit.ly/3fMhA8r>

Asian Pacific American Book List: <http://talkstorytogether.org/asian-pacific-american-book-list>

Khailova, Ladislava N. *The Stories We Share: A Guide to PreK–12 Books on the Experience of Immigrant Children and Teens in the United States*. ALA Editions, 2018.

REFORMA Recommended Book List: <https://refugeechildren.wixsite.com/refugee-children/reforma-recommended-book-list>

ORGANIZATIONAL RESOURCES

ALA Ethnic and Multicultural Information Exchange Round Table:

<https://www.ala.org/rt/emiert>

ALA Office for Diversity, Literacy and Outreach Services: <https://www.ala.org/diversity/>

American Indian Library Association: <https://ailanet.org/>

Asian/Pacific American Librarians Association: <https://www.apalaweb.org/>

Black Caucus of the American Library Association: <https://www.bcala.org/>

Chinese American Librarians Association: <https://www.cala-web.org/>

REFORMA: The National Association to Promote Library and Information:

<https://www.reforma.org/>

PARTNERSHIP & POLITICS RESOURCES

Bolt, Nancy, and Despina Gerasimidou. IFLA Celebrates World Refugee Day. IFLA, 19 June 2020 <https://www.ifla.org/node/93156>

Libraries Serve Refugees: Resources by Librarians – For Everyone

<https://refugeelibraries.org/>



PROGRAM & SERVICE DESIGN RESOURCES

Celebrating Welcome Week: A Guide for Libraries: <https://bit.ly/2XbtNgx>

Guidelines for the Development and Promotion of Multilingual Collections and Services Prepared by the Library Services to the Spanish-Speaking Committee, Reference Services Section of the Reference and User Services Association (RUSA), American Library Association, 2007 <http://www.ala.org/rusa/resources/guidelines/guidemultilingual>

Koerber, Jennifer. Library Services for Immigrants and New Americans: Celebration and Integration. Libraries Unlimited, 2018.

Library Programs and New Americans: <https://newamericans.ala.org/>

Programming Librarian: <https://programminglibrarian.org/>

Project Welcome: Libraries Serving Refugees and Asylum Seekers: <https://publish.illinois.edu/projectwelcome/>

RUSA Guidelines for Library Services to Spanish-Speaking Library Users (January 2007): <https://www.ala.org/rusa/resources/guidelines/guidespanish>

STAFF DEVELOPMENT RESOURCES

Cooke, Nicole A. Information Services to Diverse Populations: Developing Culturally Competent Library Professionals. Libraries Unlimited, 2016.

Ndumu, A. (Ed.) Borders and Belonging: Critical Examinations of Library Approaches toward Immigrants. Library Juice Press, 2021.

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To share your questions, successes, challenges, and observations, please send an email to diversity@ala.org.