



Guidelines for Outreach to Immigrant Populations

Prepared by the Guidelines for Outreach to Immigrant Populations Task Force, Ethnic and Multicultural Information Exchange Round Table, American Library Association. Approved by the EMIERT Executive Board, December 2015.

Introduction

The aim of the guidelines is to provide a basis for the development of library services and programming that facilitate recent immigrants' inclusion and participation into the broader society while also the preservation and promotion of their distinct cultural and linguistic heritages. Furthermore, the guidelines offer insight for ways in which libraries can celebrate and foster greater understanding of the cultural diversity that immigrants bring to their communities.

These guidelines may also be useful for libraries serving individuals who have lived in the US for many years, but whose activities have been confined to larger ethnic communities and/or who have experienced social exclusion. These individuals may have little or no participation in the broader society, limited English-language skills and, as a result, similar needs as recent immigrants.

1.0 Definition

Individuals immigrating to United States (US) come from diverse backgrounds and have varying levels of English-language ability and involvement with US society prior to their arrival. Upon arrival, some immigrants may speak English very well and have prior participation in the social, political and/or economic systems of the US, whereas other immigrants may have none of these advantages. Less advantaged immigrants are of primary concern as they have a much greater need for the programming and services that libraries offer. Therefore, for the purposes of the guidelines, the term 'recent immigrant' will refer to newly arrived, foreign-born individuals who have limited inclusion and participation in the social, political, and/or economic systems of the US and who speak little or no English. Recent immigrants may include, but are not limited to, asylum seekers, refugees, temporary or permanent residents, migrant workers, and diasporic individuals.

2.0 Community Needs Assessment

For libraries to respond to the needs of new immigrant communities and proactively plan budgets, allocate resources and prioritize library services, they need first to identify how communities are evolving. This identification process not only draws on a library's community outreach activities, but also depends on libraries' capacity to gather, process and absorb new information about immigrant communities and adjust their responses accordingly. Continually assess and analyze the community in order to aid in the planning and delivery of library services to meet community needs.

2.1 Learn more about your community -- there are a variety of publicly available data sets that can give you a snapshot of the different groups that your library is serving. The U.S. Census Bureau provides access to community-level data through a variety of interactive data tools, including State & County Quick Facts and American FactFinder. The National Center for Education Statistics provides various tools to view summary state and national tables of school district data. Resettlement Support Centers (refugees), NGO's, and social service agencies can also serve as information sources. Check to see if your local government has published data sets that can be helpful to you.

2.2 Take note of the services patrons seek information about or ask for assistance with in the library. Keep in mind, however, that this only tells you what people already expect to find at your library.

2.3 Consult with those organizations tied to your library or the communities your libraries serve (e.g., local non-profits and government agencies) to hear their thoughts about important community issues that the library can help to address.

2.4 Regularly monitor those issues that are discussed in community social networks and the local media.

3.0 Collection Development

In order to build culturally competent library collection, your collection should support new immigrant communities' needs for information; foster literacy activities for civic, recreational, and educational purposes; nurture the desire to use the library and its resources; contribute to the formation of cross-cultural relationships. Collection building for new immigrant communities constitutes much more than getting books or computers for the library, and giving people access to them. Collections provide important means for knowledge sharing, literacy development and community building around cultural diversity.

3.1 Start with basic information about local new immigrant communities. Conduct a poll of new immigrant users and their reading interests. Survey library staff for their knowledge about new immigrants' cultures and reading interests.

3.2 Involve new immigrant communities to advise on subjects and genre in selection decisions. Create an advisory board or committee that includes members of the immigrant communities.

3.3 Create bibliographies and reading clubs, and sponsor new immigrants who write books, articles, and reviews on materials.

3.4 Collaborate with foreign materials bookstores, publishers and distributors, and choose diverse ones, rather than only the largest.

3.5 Develop multicultural collection policies.

4.0 Programming and Services

The library should act as an entry point for immigrants to access and become part of their new community. Therefore, programming and services for recent immigrants should focus on facilitating their inclusion and participation. If possible, collaborate with local organizations and institutions working with immigrants. This will increase efficiency, prevent unnecessary duplication of programming and services in the community, and expand upon what the library can offer.

4.1 Provide opportunities for active language learning (e.g, conversing with others) in addition to text-based language-learning resources.

4.2 Keep it fun by compiling information on leisure and recreation. Some activities might not be common in immigrants' countries of origin, such as swimming or cycling, so be sure to include information about where these things can be learned – or even coordinate it with a local organization!

4.3 Ensure that health-related information, especially for women and children, is available and/or can be referenced. Provide health resources in the languages spoken by recent immigrants. Collaborate with local, state and national agencies such as the National Network of Libraries of Medicine on shared program development and promotion.

4.4 Make the library into a meeting place by creating spaces where patrons can talk and engage with each other – informal conversations are often very informative and are great ways to practice the language.

4.5 Consider offering citizenship classes and other information relevant for civic participation.

4.6 Take measures to support digital literacy. This is increasingly important for work and school related activities, as well as, communications with government and other official institutions. Basic vocabulary related to computers and software is something that we all must learn!

4.7 Be aware of within-group differences (e.g., gender, religion, education and other relevant variables) when designing services and programming.

4.8 Consider taking library services and programming to the respective communities. Recent immigrants may lack transportation, have limited knowledge of the public transportation system, and/or struggle with transportation costs.

4.9 Promote library programming and resources that support recent immigrants' economic and professional goals such as language learning resources (e.g., medical English), information for job seekers and resume preparation, professional networking opportunities, small business information and/or classes, test preparation materials (e.g., TOEFL), and/ or information about academic and technical programs.

5.0 Facilities

Welcoming, clean and de-institutionalized facilities attract groups who may not be accustomed to using the library. Library patrons should feel comfortable to move, read, and learn in comfortable spaces. Modern and clean space extends a welcome to all, particularly new immigrant populations, who enjoy the open, colorful spaces, multicultural collections, multilingual staff, and cultural programming.

5.1 Be sure the spaces in your library sufficiently accommodate growing communities; cramped and crowded libraries discourage users.

5.2 Encourage facility expansion through library policies. If little funding exists to build new rooms in your library, have constructive dialogues with local and community organizations about sharing spaces.

5.3 Consider the cultural needs of the library's clientele and their individual as well as family needs. Library policies for facilities design should be innovative and accommodating, for the interior as well as the exterior.

5.4 To encourage creativity and free expression, provide access to murals, gardens, furniture and other open spaces without too many rules and regulations.

6.0 Staffing/Personnel

Making the commitment to serve immigrant populations affects every dimension of a library operation. A key ingredient is staff. Libraries must recruit, prepare, and hold on to staff who can understand, respect, and work successfully with immigrants. Frontline library workers who are appropriately prepared will be able to build connections, provide opportunities, earn trust, ensure safety, and provide the hope and support needed by immigrants. Likewise, library leaders will have a clearer idea of staff requirements and be better able to craft a plan to recruit, hire, prepare, and retain caring and qualified library workers.

6.1 Focus on building relationships with the respective individuals/groups. This requires time for socializing and social networking! It also requires a long-term perspective, as relationships are ongoing.

6.2 If possible, hire professional and support staff with the same or similar cultural and linguistic backgrounds of recent immigrant groups

6.3 Recruit immigrants to serve on the library board. Consider recent immigrants for volunteer opportunities at the library. It provides an opportunity for staff to learn about new cultures and languages while helping the library build relations with a particular cultural and/or linguistic group.

6.4 Hold library tours for immigrant groups and host public lectures on issues of interest to immigrant communities.

6.5 Create an agency book club with peers from other community agencies to learn more about the immigrants in the community. Hold a series of roundtable discussions on immigrant issues at the library.

7.0 Community Engagement

Community engagement is at the core of outreach services and is essentially about the approach taken to outreach services. It focuses on building trusting and mutually beneficial relationships with recent immigrants, both individuals and groups. In many cases, library staff will need to make the initial effort to establish contact. Relationships can be initiated and developed through collaboration and partnerships with other community groups and organizations that are in contact with and/or provide services to recent immigrants. These may include, but are not limited to, schools (K-12, colleges, and universities), social service agencies, English-as-a-Second-Language programming, places of worship, and other community-based organizations. For more established groups, building relationships with community leaders and utilizing ethnic media outlets are other starting points.

It is important to have a plan to let the community at large, and immigrant communities in particular, know about library services. It is worthwhile to take the time to create a clear outreach message and make sure all library staff members know and understand this message.

7.1 Provide programming and publicity in English and in the native languages of a local community's immigrants. Ask partners to distribute these throughout the community.

7.2 Make the library's Web presence known to its patrons who have limited English abilities. A mirror site of the library's home page should exist, translating the contents into the preferred language of the library user. Important community events should also be available on the library's Web site in the preferred language of the library user.

7.3 Present outreach activities in non-library, but familiar, alternative locations such as community centers, ethnic and religious organizations.

7.4 Participate in the life of the community by becoming involved with or initiating local events such as festivals, commemorations, and other cultural activities related to the various ethnic, linguistic, and cultural groups in the area.

7.5 Develop contacts with the community leaders of the targeted ethnic, linguistic, and cultural groups. In the case of small or widely scattered groups, a central or cooperative library effort is the best means to provide materials and services in order to maximize efficiency and reduce costs and still provide adequate materials and services.

7.6 Show mutual respect. Learn about your immigrant community, and let your immigrant patrons know about you and the library you work for.

7.7 Create a shared vision. Work together to develop a project you and your community group are interested in that meets share goals.

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