

CELEBRATING WELCOMING WEEK

A GUIDE FOR LIBRARIES



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Presented by the Serving Refugees, Immigrants, and Displaced Persons Sub-Committee of the Office of Diversity, Literacy and Outreach Services American Library Association

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Introduction

[Welcoming Week](#) is an annual series of events during September when neighbors, newcomers, and long-time residents come together in a spirit of unity. Welcoming Week events are dynamic opportunities to encourage inclusion, dialogue and community-building through potlucks, film festivals, fairs, symposia, and other creative efforts. They provide a wonderful opportunity to gather members of all backgrounds with the expressed intent of hospitality, inclusiveness, and friendship. They are also perfect opportunities to build collaborative relationships with local community organizations, faith-based entities, creative performers and artists, and civic leaders. Libraries—whether school, public, or academic—all play an important and unique role in helping communities become more welcoming!

This event was started by [Welcoming America](#), an organization that is promoting an initiative among U.S. cities, counties, states, and non-profit organizations to bring together immigrant and non-immigrant communities. Check out Welcoming America on how your library and community can be involved with Welcoming Week activities in your community beyond those we have included below. To be featured, access resources and webinars, and to learn more, check out the Welcoming Week website.

Suggested Welcoming Week Activities

Below is a sample of Welcoming Week activities to try in your library. We encourage you to adapt these programs to your targeted audiences or the broader community.

- Host a Conversation Club or a [Human Library](#).
- Host a showcase event with local organizations.
- Host a public history event to collect community stories about refugees and immigrants to inspire connections and reciprocity.
- Host Storytime with immigrant stories.
- Host book clubs focused on immigrant stories.
- Create reading lists.
- Create a book and/or wall display of immigrant-centered materials.
- Invite and host author/creator visits from those who identify as refugees/asylees.
- Host film showings and discussion of films related to immigration, refugees, or asylum seekers.
- Launch digital photo “I stand with immigrants because...” campaign.

Funding Welcoming Week Programs

There are a variety of opportunities to receive financial or resource support for bringing programming and services to immigrant communities in your area. The following funding sources are categorized by geographic level with links for more information:

National Level

The following funding opportunities are available for any library and/or organization within the United States.

[Dollar General Literacy Foundation Literacy](#)

The grant program options are available for adult literacy, family literacy, and youth literacy. Grants can be applied to organizations, schools, and libraries.

[Innovative Reading Grant](#)

This annual grant of \$2,500, only available to AASL (American Association of School Libraries) members, supports the planning and implementation of a unique and innovative program for K-9th grade learners which motivates and encourages reading, especially with struggling readers.

[Carnegie-Whitney Grants](#)

This grant of up to \$5,000 for the preparation of popular or scholarly reading lists, webliographies, indexes, and other guides to library resources that will be useful to users of all types of libraries in the United States.

[National Leadership Grants for Libraries](#)

This grant is provided by the IMLS (Institute of Museum and Library Services), which focuses on supporting projects that address critical needs of the library and archives fields and have the potential to advance practice and strengthen library and archival services for the American public. The award amount and cost sharing are divided into four project types: planning grants, forum grants, implementation grants, and resource sharing grants.

[U.S. Department of Health & Human Services Ethnic Community Self-Help Program Programs \(ECSH\)](#)

The ECSH Program supports ethnic community-based organizations in professional development for their staff by connecting them with well-established service providers

[Citizenship and Integration Grant Program from USCIS](#)

This grant focuses on providing citizenship preparation resources, support, and information lawful permanent residents.

State Level

Different state libraries may provide funding and/or resources focused on specific areas. Check with your state library association to learn more about what grant, scholarship, and award opportunities may be available. Reach out to your state library to see what they can do to improve library services to immigrant and refugee populations.

Examples of state level funding opportunities:

[California State Library: LSTA \(Library Services and Technology Act\)](#)

Offers local and collaborative grants.

[California Humanities Library Innovation Lab \(LIL\)](#)

The focus of the LIL program is “Exploring New Ways of Engaging Immigrant Communities through Public Humanities Programming.” This program trains library staff in program design and helps to create immigrant-focused library programs.

[Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction: Division of Libraries and Technology](#)

State and federally funded grants within the state of Wisconsin.

[State Library of Ohio: LSTA Competitive Grant](#)

Accepts proposal under one of three focus areas: Library as Community Anchor, Literacy, and Outreach & Engagement.

[State Library of Pennsylvania: LSTA grants](#)

Accept competitive proposals under three categories: Local Library Grant, Statewide Library Services Grant and Fiscal Agent Grant.

Local level

Your local area may also have a wide variety of collaboration partners and funding opportunities. Considering the size of your library and service area, you may be able to connect and partner with various individuals and groups in your community. Here are a few examples of where to find support for Welcoming Week-related programming:

- **Fundraising groups** within your libraries, such as a Friends group or the Development office (depending on your library organization size and staffing).
- **Organizations that support immigrant and refugee services**, such as resettlement agencies, immigrant service organizations, English language learning opportunities, and other organizations that provide services for housing, employment, social services, etc.
- **Community foundations and service clubs** that provide support to the community, such as your local Rotary Club, Lions Club, and volunteer organizations.
- Connecting with **local businesses** that do community services and engagement and seeing if there's possible partnership opportunities.
- Checking with your **local government and offices**, such as offices that provide services for the immigrant community.

Case Studies

Welcoming Week activities are successful when diverse community organizations cooperate, engage community members to develop the activities, and work collectively and coordinate with local government agencies. The libraries that were selected as case studies represent different sizes, budgets, and stages of planning and experiences with Welcoming Week celebrations. The interviewees share their experiences, in order for other libraries to learn from their goals, practices and challenges.

Small and Rural Libraries

Sherwood Public Library, Sherwood, Oregon

Sherwood Public Library (SPL) provided multicultural story time programs, led by guest readers. They sought out community members from different cultures and created culturally specific craft activities to accompany the program. These World Language Storytimes provided programs in Hindi, Spanish, Arabic, and Vietnamese. In addition to finding native language presenters to provide story times, library staff ensured that each individual was also trained for story time. Each story time had an accompanying craft activity. Examples of what was used are below:

- World Language Take & Make Craft Kit
- Tiger craft kit
- Mini terracotta pinch pot craft kit
- Camel craft kit
- Dragonfly craft kit

SPL also hosted a cultural performance with guest performers from Ballet Folklórico Corazones Alegres, a local dance troupe from Washington County. In addition to programs, SPL also was able to fund the creation of light pole banners that can be used each year along the city's main street, along with promotional flyers and a social media campaign.

The library was fortunate to receive a regional grant in 2022 from the Oregon Cultural Trust and the Cultural Coalition of Washington County to begin and help with costs. These grants are awarded to support art, equity, and diverse experiences. Organizations are welcome to apply each year, but they do not support ongoing programs. Reflecting on these programs after 2022, SPL is hoping to be able to sustain these programs by carving out funds to continue their support of Welcome Week. SPL has continued to celebrate Welcoming Week by adding small things here and there. The following year, SPL emphasized and promoted new library services for New Americans.

Regardless of size, SPL believes it sometimes starts with something small. Small things are a start, and you can easily build from them as you go. For example, SPL will continue to hang up

the Welcoming Week signs in town, regardless of the number of programs they may have from one year to the next. It is about making Welcoming Week known throughout the community.

Public Library of Mount Vernon and Knox County, Mt Vernon and Knox County, Ohio

The Public Library of Mount Vernon and Knox County (PLMVKC) has celebrated Welcoming Week with a variety of programs for the community. These have included a community picnic, book discussions for children and adults, and book giveaways. At the community picnic, PLMVKC invited a local chef, Chef Nav Adjodhya, who is a first-generation Guyanese and well-known throughout the community. He spoke about his background in cooking, his experiences moving from New York City to Mount Vernon, and the influence of multiple cultures on his life and craft.

PLMVKC hosted several book giveaway events for both children and adults. The selected title for children was Kwaheri Sandy Footprints, Habari Hiking Trails by a local author, Debbie Nabubwaya Chambers. This title detailed the author's biracial/Nigerian-American family's experience moving from San Diego to Mount Vernon, Ohio. The selected title for adults was Solito: A Memoir by Javier Zamora. For both book selections, the library hosted an accompanying book discussion program.

The community of PLMVKC, at the start of their Welcoming Week celebration, was experiencing rapid growth and observed that not everyone was "ready" to welcome new people as community members. This, in addition to rural gentrification, also contributed to the heightened hostility to those perceived as "outsiders." PLMVKC is a major community hub, and they serve everyone who walks through their doors. The library is a great place to center Welcoming Week activities for all.

As a smaller library system, PLMVKC took advantage of free resources, particularly Welcoming America's toolkits. Any library can do this, and your first Welcoming Week does not have to be filled with programs. PLMVKC encourages everyone to start small in their first year. The difficulties that they struggled to find were meeting times for busy community members and avoiding staff and coalition burnout. Moving forward, library staff acknowledged they may have been a little too ambitious and are adjusting for future Welcoming Week celebrations by laying down a better groundwork to build from.

Large and Urban Libraries

Los Angeles Public Library, California

Welcome week is all year long with the Los Angeles Public Library (LAPL) in California as they partner daily with the International Rescue Committee (IRC) in providing the library's [New Americans initiative](#) and their [Be a Successful Street Vendor initiative](#). [Know Your Rights](#) cards and workshops are available as well for New Arrivals.

Broward County Library, Florida

Located in South Florida, Broward County Library (BCL) meets the principles addressing cultural and linguistic diversity as noted in the IFLA/UNESCO Multicultural Library Manifesto. BCL employs staff to reflect the diversity of the community, who are trained to work with and serve diverse communities. All branches of the BCL host bilingual English Cafés, Computer Classes, and Citizenship Classes.

Queens Public Library, New York

Queens Public Library (QPL) provides monthly clinics at the library for legal immigration services. QPL is one of two ID NYC locations in Queens. The New Americans Program celebrates Queens residents' cultures and helps newcomers understand life in the United States. They have "Know Your Rights Workshops" and "Free Resources for New Arrivals Workshops."

Celebrating Year-Round

Libraries endeavor to welcome people of all backgrounds every day. The principles of Welcoming Week are applicable throughout the year and can be incorporated into a strategy built around the demographics and needs of your library's community. We encourage all libraries to take a critical look at what we are doing and encourage cultural humility and learning, training for staff, expanding diversity within programming, and moving beyond performative work. Here are some examples of ways to celebrate year-round, grouped by intended outcomes.

Outcome 1: Build partnerships

- Collaborate with local organizations to provide services and/or resources.
- Meet refugee needs through programs/resources specifically designed for those audiences.
- Collaborate with student affinity/diversity groups to host a speaker.
- Provide online or print resource list sharing school resources for students who identify as immigrants or refugees.
- Collaborate with educators on lessons about immigrant and refugee history and rights.
- Establish "Know Your Rights" sessions and informational materials.
- Host citizenship test prep workshops and [partner with USCIS](#).

Outcome 2: Transform library programs

- Re-imagine programming to include diverse voices that foster and promote affinity and interconnection.
- Incorporate book titles, films, and media that celebrate immigrant stories into your library's regular programs.
- Conduct community outreach to see how your library can best meet the needs of your local immigrant or refugee community.

Outcome 3: Develop awareness

- building library and community knowledge of and advocacy for immigrants and refugees.
- Host Lunch-N-Learns.
- Review and share toolkits and relevant resources.
- Share experiences and resources via social media and library affiliate organizations.
- Post a position statement in solidarity with immigrants and refugees on your library's website or social media.

Explore these resources as further support as a starting point:

[Becoming a Welcoming Space for Immigrants and Refugees](#)

“In 2019, the Association for Library Service to Children (ALSC) received an [IMLS](#) National Forum Grant to bring together members of ALSC and the Association of Children's Museums (ACM) to develop a best practices resource for library and museums serving people who have recently immigrated to or sought refuge in the United States. While COVID-19 prevented an in-person gathering, a virtual forum and We Are ALSC Chat occurred in 2022 and 2023 respectively. The following information culls together ideas from these forums and current research on how public libraries might become a welcoming space for immigrant and refugee families.”

[New Americans Library Project: The White Paper](#)

“In 2018, the ALA Public Programs Office convened an exploration of public library programs and services that support new American populations. The New Americans Library Project explored the landscape of literature and resources about library services for new Americans, studied how libraries can more effectively serve new Americans, and made recommendations about this topic for the library field.”

“This white paper provides a synthesis of the project to help library professionals understand opportunities for libraries' work with new Americans. The paper includes two parts. First, an overview of research and findings summarizes the most salient themes uncovered in the landscape review and site visits. Second, we offer a list of actionable recommendations for libraries.”

REFORMA International Relations Committee’s Webinar on [“Library Services for Recently Arrived Latino Immigrants” recording](#)

“Our world is in turmoil. Latinos from different countries and heritage backgrounds are in need of library services supporting human rights. The information seeking process is driven by major life transitions such as violence against women and human rights violations. People from different countries are suffering from restrictions and censorship of their basic life rights that we take for granted here in the U.S.A. REFORMA is presenting an online event to discuss actionable ways in which librarians can support information needs for Latinos experiencing these situations.”

[Guidelines for Outreach to Immigrant Populations Toolkit](#), as prepared by the Ethnic and Multicultural Information Exchange Round Table (EMIERT) of ALA

“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.”

Conclusion

Welcoming Week is a great way to initiate connections and programming with the immigrant community, but libraries should not limit themselves to one week of programs to celebrate the diversity of their communities. We invite libraries to take a critical look at their work; alongside expanding their programs, we encourage cultural humility and learning, training for staff, and moving beyond performative work.