

Best Practices for LSTA-Funded Outreach to Immigrant and Language-Minority Populations

A. Library staff outside, people inside

- a. *There is no substitute for comprehensive face-to-face outreach.* To understand the needs of your targeted population and to position your library as a respected institution within the community, you must leave the library, go into the community, and directly ask as many people as possible what they need. Organizations, influential individuals, and community stakeholders all make valuable partners, but it is dangerous to assume that one person is qualified to speak for an entire group.
- b. *Outreach IS the job.* Community involvement is as important to the success of your library as shelving and cataloguing. Make face-to-face outreach an everyday part of library business. Schedule paid time during the work week for staff to attend formal and informal community gatherings and celebrations, recreation centers, social clubs, or any other busy space where the library can be promoted and staff can assess needs. Ignoring the legwork reflects as poorly on your library and its priorities as if you had left your books in a pile on the floor.
- c. *Outreach shapes the program.* You cannot accurately determine the library needs of your target population without outreach, nor can you build the kind of community relationships that get people through library doors. Libraries that put off outreach activities until after their LSTA programs have been designed, approved and implemented inevitably find themselves scrambling for an audience, but libraries that build their programs on the data gathered and relationships established through prior outreach can achieve long-term success.

B. Building community support

- a. *Do a planning grant.* If your library has never done comprehensive outreach before, or if your library needs to hire additional staff in order to free up time for outreach activities, you should consider doing a planning grant before embarking on a major LSTA-funded demonstration project. The “pre-outreach” activities discussed in this section can constitute their own grant project. For more information on writing a planning grant, call the Library Development Services office of the Oregon State Library at (503) 378-2525.
- b. *Nothing exists in a support vacuum.* The most effective library outreach projects have been built upon strong pre-existing community support for minority populations. If you live in an area where support is lacking – for example, where the dominant minority population lacks a political voice, or where the majority population is unaware of or hostile to the needs of the minority – you must seek out support where you can and cultivate it to a point where your target population along with key organizations and individuals in the community accepts the need for outreach. This process cannot be rushed; it may take weeks or decades, depending on your community.
- c. *It's never too early for outreach.* Outreach programs invariably involve an incursion into the personal space of your targeted group. Whether your

library is perceived as an intruder, a guest, or a full-fledged member of the community depends on how well you have paved the way for your program. Before your LSTA grant proposal has even been written, you must convince the community that the library is a safe, non-judgmental place where cultural preferences and individual needs are respected. Meanwhile, your library will use these trust- and respect-building outreach activities to determine the information needs of your targeted population.

- i. Brainstorm a long and thorough list of questions to ask members of your community. Start with basic needs analysis: for example, what do people need from the library? What community resources and services already exist in your service area, and would these organizations be interested in a partnership? After you've developed a good picture of your target population and its needs, try to anticipate issues specific to your project that may affect its outcome. Will parents allow their children to participate in afterschool activities? How do people secure transportation to and from the library? Is your target population seasonally employed? The more questions you ask of individuals and organizations during the beginning outreach phase, the less time you will spend coping with unexpected circumstances after the program is underway.
- ii. Examine your library's policies and adjust them according to the image you wish to project to your target population. How flexible are your rules, and can they be easily understood by people who are unfamiliar with libraries? Is the layout of the library welcoming and easy to navigate, especially for first-time visitors who may be reluctant to ask where materials are kept? Are the materials in your library designed to be heavily used and easily replaced? Is your staff equipped to overcome language barriers, and are they capable of clearly explaining library concepts without resorting to jargon? The cheerful and welcoming face you project to the community outside must match the institutional culture they encounter inside.
- iii. Find community ambassadors who are willing to help the library connect with the community. These are members of the community who hold positions (official or unofficial) of respect and influence – for example, a religious leader or owner of a popular local business. Positive relationships with influential individuals open up other avenues for outreach.
 1. There is no such thing as a “typical member” of a community. No one person or organization, no matter how visible or well-connected, can act as an authoritative spokesperson for the entire group. By asking as many people as possible what they need from the library, you will develop a comprehensive picture of library needs in your area while assuring members of your target population that you respect them as individuals.
- d. *Build institutional support.* Mutually beneficial partnerships with community advocacy and support groups, local media, government agencies, and schools are necessary for program success. While the partners you choose will be

largely dependant on the goals of your project and the resources available in your area, you must speak to at least one of the following organizations:

- i. Local agencies that provide support and housing to minority populations, including Housing and Urban Development, Goodwill Industries, Volunteers of America, Oregon Humanities, and Northwest Housing Alternatives.
- ii. Churches and religious support networks. In communities where resources for minority populations are inadequate, religious congregations often provide the most cohesive and supportive community. Larger religious agencies include Lutheran Community Services Northwest, Ecumenical Ministries of Oregon, and Oregon Buddhist Temple.
- iii. Local media outlets, including publications, television and radio stations. Local sources targeting specific ethnic populations include the Asian Reporter and El Latino de Hoy newspapers; Univision affiliate KUNP-TV; and multiple Spanish radio stations including KSND (Woodburn), KWBY (Portland), KKJX (Klamath Falls) and KZZM (Weston/Umatilla County). A guide to Oregon media resources can be found at <http://bluebook.state.or.us/cultural/media/media.htm>.
- iv. Agencies that serve specific ethnic communities in Oregon, including Immigrant and Refugee Community Organization (IRCO), Hacienda CDC, Russian Oregon Social Services (ROSS), Vietnamese Community of Oregon, and Cambodian-American Community of Oregon (CICO).

C. Organizing resources and staff

- a. *Outreach coordinators can't do it all.* Your staff must be on board with the project and have a say in its development. Everyone should receive at least some outreach training, and more than one staff member should be able to conduct outside outreach activities. Assigning multiple staff members to the outreach "beat" allows your library to cover more ground and reach more people while giving staff ownership of the project.
- b. *Volunteers cost.* The value of volunteers to libraries and outreach programs cannot be underestimated. While volunteers provide a valuable support system that few major programs could do without, do not attempt to shrink your project budget by hiring volunteers to do jobs that would otherwise be assigned to paid library staff.
 - i. The services your library offers must be equivalent to all populations. Unequal services send a strong negative message to your target population. If, for example, your English-language story time is run by a children's librarian, your Mandarin story time must be run by someone with comparable experience.
 - ii. Hiring and training volunteers requires time and money. If volunteers are not properly trained or if the work they are assigned to do is difficult, thankless or otherwise goes beyond what volunteers in your area are willing to do for no pay, turnover will be rapid. In order to

build a dependable volunteer base, assign volunteers to tasks based on their individual skills and work preferences.

D. Programming and collections for a multicultural audience

- a. *Bilingual ≠ Bicultural.* It is not enough to simply translate existing services and materials into another language. People come into the library when they see their own cultural preferences and values represented there, and they become regular patrons when they feel welcome.
 - i. Hire bicultural staff who can act as outreach ambassadors. Train non-bilingual staff to communicate with cultural sensitivity and to have the patience and skills to overcome language barriers.
 - ii. Use staff and community contacts to identify areas where your library could improve its cultural compatibility, and allow the community to give ongoing feedback after changes have been made.
 - iii. When possible, purchase books and materials originally written in the language/languages spoken by your target population rather than translated English materials.
 - iv. Always encourage patrons to recommend materials and programming. Let patrons know that the library is willing to make space on the shelf for popular materials that have not been provided in the past (for example, Spanish-language fotonovelas or Russian rock CDs).
 - v. Do not automatically assume that your target population always prefers foreign-language materials and programming; for example, first generation immigrant parents often choose to attend bilingual or English-only story times in order to ensure that their children will be English-proficient.
- b. *Work those networks.* Word of mouth just can't be beat as a promotional tool among minority populations. The groundwork for a strong word-of-mouth network must be created during the initial outreach process. Use your community ambassadors and partners to spread the news about your program at local events. Back up your word of mouth campaign with television and radio ads and spoken announcements at community gatherings.
 - i. While important information about the library should always be translated and printed, print is not always an effective medium for advertising library services and programs. If English- or 1st language literacy levels among your target population are low, or if the library does not have access to a translator who is fluent in both the written language and its cultural context, keep print materials to a minimum.
- c. *Good collections are built on persistence.* Few good solutions exist for libraries that wish to expand their foreign language collections with the needs and preferences of their patrons in mind. Materials offered by standard vendors are sparse and often lack popular appeal, while those available from smaller international vendors can be cheaply produced and subject to extremely short print runs. Be prepared to cast a wide net, to spend time

communicating directly with booksellers, to network with library contacts, and to travel if necessary.

- d. *Adults are family, too.* Adults often face greater barriers to access than children, who may become enthusiastic patrons while their caregivers remain unwilling or unable to use library services, if not unaware of their availability. While “family programming” often implies an emphasis on young children, you can use these programs as an opportunity to directly address the library needs of adults. Always schedule family programming when adults are most likely to have available time and transportation. Give adults an incentive to come to the library with their children; these can include food, entertainment, or book giveaways. Even events that are strongly child-focused, such as infant story time, can be an opportunity to promote adult collections and services and to ask older patrons what they need from the library.

Appendix: Selected past grants

- a. 08-01-5p: Cornelius Public Library: Promoting Targeted Library Services to Latinos.
 - a. A bilingual outreach coordinator was hired to establish cooperative partnerships with agencies serving the Hispanic community. Multiple Spanish-language programs were launched and Spanish-language collections were expanded.
- b. 08-05-5p: Multnomah County Library: This is How I Use My Library.
 - a. Multnomah County Library produced instructional DVDs on library procedures and policies for Russian, Vietnamese, and Chinese speakers. These DVDs were designed for use across Oregon.

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