
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, American Library Association. Approved by the RUSA Board of Directors, January 2007.

1.0 INTRODUCTION

Traditionally, the United States has been a country that attracts large numbers of immigrants from all over the globe. While some libraries have established collections and programs to serve the needs of library-users whose native language is not English, little has been done on a national scale to systematically address these needs. In addition, the multilingual needs of library patrons who are language students, foreign students or bilingual citizens have been under-served by traditional library services.

It is the responsibility of libraries to provide an equitable level of service to all members of their communities regardless of ethnic, cultural, or linguistic background. Providing library materials for ethnic, cultural and linguistic groups should not be seen as an “additional” or “extra” service, but as an integral part of every library’s services. Libraries should establish goals, objectives, and policies that integrate multilingual services into their overall work plan. These guidelines should serve as models with which to assess the provision of services and materials.

2.0 COLLECTION AND SELECTION OF MATERIALS

Provide an effective, balanced, and substantial collection for each ethnic, cultural or linguistic group in the community. Purchase materials in the languages, dialects, etc. of the groups served.

Consider the demand and availability of materials as important factors in establishing a level of collection development. The low volume of publishing in some languages or difficulty in obtaining publications may make it impossible to provide the same amount of material in all languages. Bindings and paper quality of the materials may not be equal to the quality of materials typically purchased in the United States, Canada, and elsewhere. Libraries may find it necessary to purchase from small presses, publishers and bookstores outside the country, neighborhood bookstores, conferences, and book fairs.

2.1 Levels for Selection

2.1.1 Provide library materials related primarily to the population of the targeted ethnic, linguistic, or cultural groups served.

2.1.2 Base materials selection on community analyses, needs assessments, and statistical data such as the U.S. Cen-

sus. Appropriate aids include focus groups, interviews and questionnaires.

2.1.3 Provide a cross-section of subjects, literary genres, geographic areas and time periods appropriate to the users' interests and needs. In order to provide information and to promote intercultural awareness and understanding, it is also desirable that library materials, reflecting the interests and experiences of the various cultural groups of the community, be available in both English and the original language, by authors from each national, linguistic and cultural group represented in the community.

2.2 Formats

2.2.1 Acquire materials in a variety of formats, which may include print, audio, audio-visual, and computer software as appropriate to diverse patron needs. When print materials are scarce, or when literacy materials are in high demand, place an emphasis on acquiring non-print materials, such as audio recordings and videos.

2.2.2 Provide literacy materials, including computers with literacy software, in the native languages of their non-English speaking patrons.

2.2.3 Provide language-learning materials to encourage heritage language retention and to provide all members of the community with an opportunity to learn or review other languages. Also provide materials of all types to aid in learning English as a second language, including materials oriented toward learners of specific language backgrounds.

2.3 Bibliographic Access

2.3.1 Catalog all materials in the original language and script. Provide bibliographic access in both English and the original language.

2.4 Physical Access

2.4.1 Ensure that multilingual collections housed separately are visible and accessible to the community.

2.4.2 Display highly visible directional signage in the languages of the major linguistic groups that use the library's multilingual collection.

2.4.3 Provide forms, notices, information pamphlets and other printed materials in targeted languages.

2.4.4 Provide access, signage, and appropriate technology for accessing the materials in all formats with clear instructions and librarian assistance available when necessary for the hearing, visually, and physically impaired members of the community.

2.5 Collection Maintenance

2.5.1 Collection policies should allow for the purchase of multiple copies of items so that the physical stock for all languages is adequate.

2.5.2 Evaluate out-of-date and worn-out materials on a regular basis, then discarded or offer to community organizations' archives or special collections, or other appropriate groups.

2.5.3 Maintain preservation measures such as rebinding to repair worn-out materials that are heavily used and still relevant. Also facilitate, encourage, and sponsor the preservation of original materials that relate to the heritage of local ethnic, linguistic, and cultural groups.

2.5.4 Demand should not be used as a sole, determining factor in collection development. Low demand for multilingual materials may be the result of inadequate collections, services, or publicity in the past.

3.0 PROGRAMS, SERVICES, AND COMMUNITY RELATIONS

Provide and actively promote multilingual services and programming for the various ethnic groups in the community.

Provide multilingual services at the same levels according to the same standards as for the general public. Library card applications, interlibrary loan information, welcome brochures, and other information should be in the preferred language of the library user.

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.

3.1 Cultural Diversity

3.1.1 Because the population served may be comprised of various cultures, each specific culture must be considered in the development of programming and services.

3.1.2 The degree of bilingualism and the retention of linguistic cultural identity by particular groups, as well as the level of social integration/assimilation will also determine the level of service to a particular ethnic group. Some members of these groups may wish to be regarded as Americans only, rather than as members of an ethnic group.

3.2 Programming and Marketing

3.2.1 Direct social and cultural community activities toward the targeted ethnic, linguistic, and cultural groups. Programs such as concerts of ethnic music, exhibitions, and demon-

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strations of traditional arts and crafts may be considered appropriate examples.

3.2.2 Provide programming and publicity in the preferred languages of the ethnic groups as well as in English. Take into account the sensibilities and expectations of the targeted group when promoting library services.

3.2.3 Provide facilities, promote, and offer English-as-a-second-language, literacy classes, and programs for English learners.

3.2.4 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.

3.3 Outreach Services

3.3.1 Provide multilingual services and materials to those patrons not able to use the library personally, including homebound patrons and those in correctional institutions and hospitals.

3.3.2 Present outreach activities in non-library, but familiar, alternative locations, such as factories, meeting rooms of ethnic organizations, and places of worship.

3.3.3 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. Entertain non-traditional partnerships with media, social service agencies, and community-based organizations. Produce and disseminate information about the various ethnic, linguistic, and cultural groups in the community.

3.4 Information and Reference Services

3.4.1 Provide reference and information services in the most commonly used languages. In addition, special effort must be made to provide service to recently arrived immigrant groups.

3.4.2 Provide the same level of service for interlibrary loan in all languages as for the English-speaking patrons.

3.4.3 Provide reference and referral services about multicultural and multilingual local resources.

3.4.4 Provide bibliographic instruction in appropriate languages as necessary.

4.0 Staffing

4.1 Library staff working with patrons who have limited English abilities should be multilingual in order to provide effective service.

4.2 Offer continuing education or staff development programs that promote sensitivity and cultural, ethnic, and linguistic awareness of the staff and enhance their abilities in dealing with ethnically different patrons.

4.3 Library staff with expertise in languages and cultures should share their expertise with other staff and other libraries and be recognized and financially compensated for these abilities.

4.4 Schools of library science should advertise the need for multicultural and multilingual librarians and actively recruit people of linguistic and ethnic minorities. They should offer courses that deal with the issues involved in serving an ethnically, culturally, and linguistically diverse society.

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