Guidelines for Library Services to Spanish-Speaking Library Users

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Revised in 2006 by the Library Services to the Spanish-Speaking Committee, Reference Services Section of the Reference and User Services Association, American Library Association. (Originally adopted by the Reference and Adult Services Division Board of Directors, January 1988.) Approved by the RUSA Board of Directors, January 2007.

Introduction

Library services to Spanish-speaking users can be complex: nationality, regional differences, and culture provide myriad combinations within that community. As an example, there are significant linguistic and cultural differences reflected in the varieties of Spanish spoken by Mexicans, Puerto Ricans, Cubans, and other Spanish-speaking groups. To recognize and respond correctly to these differences is a major theme within these guidelines. Although the committee is aware of numerous terms for this target population, it has chose to use the term "Spanish-speaking" in order to encompass the many users that make up this diverse community instead of the outdated and limiting term of "Hispanic" (see appendix).

REFORMA, the National Association to Promote Library and Information Services to Latinos and the Spanish Speaking, has taken a role in the production of this document: one committee member served as liaison to REFORMA, and the organization has given input throughout the revision process.

Although these guidelines were written by persons with professional interest in service to Spanish-speaking library users, they were written consciously for all library personnel who see a need to initiate service to this population. In that sense, the guidelines are a basic beginner's manual intended for a hypothetical librarian serving as an administrator of a medium-to-small institution having become aware of the needs of Spanish-speaking communities within its service area. As with any guidelines, these are designed to aid in the development of that service and to remind readers of professional concerns regarding the target population.

1.0 Collection and Selection of Materials

Spanish-speaking communities in the United States have varying language skills and competencies in English and Spanish. The members of these communities have diverse needs and are entitled to access to materials that meet those needs. Use standard criteria to aid in the selection of library materials. In order to best carry out a systematic focus for collection development for these communities, develop and regularly update a Spanish Language Collection Development Policy.

1.1 Relevancy

1.1.1 Library materials for Spanish-speaking library users should meet the educational and recreational needs of the communities served. Libraries should provide appropriate and culturally relevant materials at a level that meets the needs and interests of the various user groups represented in the communities.

1.2 Language

1.2.1 The collection should also contain bilingual materials. Emphasize titles from publishers in the countries represented by the major user groups in these communities. The collection should also contain standard Spanish language titles from Spanish-speaking communities and countries. When purchasing translated works, carefully examine the languages used to insure accuracy and faithfulness to the original work.

1.3 Bibliographic Access

1.3.1 Bibliographic access to the library's collection should include Spanish-language subject headings in the public catalog to facilitate the location of Spanish-language and bilingual materials. Also provide any locally produced access and identification aids, including lists, bibliographies, and point-of-use bibliographic instructional materials in Spanish.

1.4 Formats

1.4.1 Collect all formats including both print and non-print materials. Include all reading levels, whether educational or recreational. Supplement traditional print and audiovisual materials with electronic resources available on the Internet.

1.5 Selection

1.5.1 Selection of Spanish language materials should follow the established procedures for collection development. Consult general and specialized evaluation tools.

1.5.2 In addition to Spanish review publications and popular Spanish periodicals, regularly review Spanish language resources, listservs, Web sites, and other Internet resources to identify potential materials to include in the collection.

1.6 Use of vendors in acquiring Spanish-language titles

1.6.1 Carefully select and evaluate vendors that supply Spanish language materials. Take into consideration the country of origin and communities served. As part of the process for acquiring Spanish language materials, develop good professional relationships with vendors and continually explore different options and services. Support local Spanish language bookstores and consider them important sources of information and materials. Select and evaluate bookstores and their services on an ongoing basis.

1.7 Promoting support for the Spanish language collection through gifts and donations

1.7.1 Work with local community groups in selecting, acquiring, evaluating and weeding Spanish language collections. Encourage local support through gifts, exchanges and donations to the collection. When evaluating these items, consider the formally established criteria included in a gifts and donations policy statement. Apply normal selection criteria when determining whether to add gifts and donations to the collections. Include those materials not appropriate for the collection in book sales, exchanges or donations to other libraries or organizations that serve Spanish-speaking communities.

1.8 Evaluating Spanish language collections

1.8.1 Criteria used in evaluating Spanish language collections should be consistent with review and maintenance policies of the library.

2.0 Programs, Services, and Community Relations

In keeping with the ALA policy supporting multilingual services, carefully select the language used for programming and services (bilingual or Spanish only) as well as regional linguistic characteristics of vocabulary, accent, and nuance. Choices should reflect the characteristics of the local community.

2.1 Diversity of Culture

2.1.1 To understand the composition and needs of the target populations, develop a profile of the Spanish-speaking communities the library intends to serve. Federal census data, state government statistics, and interviews with local leaders, local residents, and other community organizations will assist in the development of the community profile. A meaningful community profile will include such information as gender, age, level of education, language skills and country of origin.

2.2 Programs

2.2.1 Traditional and non-traditional creative programming effectively attracts and meets the needs of Spanish-speaking communities. Because of limited resources available for services to the Spanish-speaking community within any given institution, libraries serving the target population should cooperate with local community groups. Such cooperation may include the sharing of program costs, cooperative acquisitions, or joint (reciprocal) borrowing privileges, to name but a few.

2.2.2 Programs developed to provide library orientation or service should recognize bias by social and economic forces present among this group such as immigration or transient aspects of labor.

2.2.3 The Spanish-speaking populations served may consist of a mix of economic and social factors that combine to form a very diverse culture. Each represented culture must be considered in the development of programming and should be accurately reflected in the program content.

2.3 Outreach Services

2.3.1 Continually assess and analyze the community in order to aid in the planning and delivery of library services to meet community needs. Further these aims by: participating in the work of local community organizations that serve the Spanish-speaking; establishing partnerships with such organizations in the development and presentation of library programs and services; using local radio and cable programs, public service announcements, newspapers and regional Internet providers as a means of communicating with the targeted populations.

2.3.2 Also consider library nonusers. Use programs, literature, and publicity in creative ways and in a variety of settings to attract those for whom libraries are not part of their life experience.

2.4 Intercultural Understanding

2.4.1 As part of its activities in working with local populations representing a multiplicity of cultures, the library should actively promote intercultural communication and cooperation.

2.4.2 Schedule cultural events such as exhibits of art, dance, music etc. in appreciation of the contributions and heritages of Spanish-speaking cultures during traditional festivals and holidays.

2.5 Bibliographic Instruction

2.5.1 Offer library instruction in Spanish that highlights bilingual or language specific formats.

2.6 Electronic resources

2.6.1 Provide the target community with access to and training in the use of electronic resources, including full-text databases, online resources, and Internet access.

2.6.1.1 Provide bi-lingual written policies for access to public terminals with Internet connection.

2.6.2 Provide access to, and bilingual training in, the use of electronic resources to Spanish-speaking communities.

2.6.2.1 Provide access to digital format, Spanish-language, government publications when available. Provision of access to electronic resources in all formats is an especially important service that must be provided to users who may have had limited experience in the use of computer technology.

3.0 Personnel

3.1 Recruitment

3.1.1 Recruit Spanish-speaking library personnel in all job classifications, i.e. librarians, paraprofessionals, clerical workers and volunteers.

3.1.2 Contact Spanish-speaking graduates of library education programs accredited by the American Library Association.

3.1.3 Make extensive use of hotlines, minority recruiting services, local Spanish-language media, and services provided by Latino library organizations.

3.2 Compensation

3.2.1 Recognize and financially compensate bilingual employees in positions where job specifications or actual conditions require the knowledge of Spanish.

3.3 Staff Development

3.3.1 Encourage staff development at all job levels.

3.3.2 Provide diversity training for all staff. Include workshops on library services to Spanish speakers such as: collection development for Spanish language materials or classes on different aspects of Spanish/Hispanic/Latino cultures, i.e. music, authors, etc.

3.3.3 Make educational opportunities available to non Spanish-speaking staff to learn the language. This could include: providing a teacher for basic Spanish classes offered for all library staff; developing a professional collection of language learning materials such as books, cassettes, videos or computer software for staff use; providing benefits or encouraging staff to make use of already existing benefits such as educational reimbursement for community college classes and flex time to allow staff to take classes that fit into their work schedule.

4.0 Facilities

The library building, through its location, signage, architecture, and appearance, should be an attraction, not a barrier, to members of the Spanish-speaking communities that it serves.

4.1 Interior and Exterior

4.1.1 Choose decorations and graphics to modify interior and exterior to create an ambience suitable to the clientele served. Multicultural posters and displays help to create a welcoming environment. Take care that the alterations made will conform to the culture of the community.

4.2 Location

4.2.1 Locate new library buildings conveniently and strategically in order to attract the target population to the library. Determine the location of the library in terms of its proximity to local schools and public transportation.

4.2.2 Place comfortable seating near the Spanish collection for those patrons who prefer to use the materials in the library.

4.2.3 Make meeting rooms equally accessible to the Spanish-speaking communities, and promote them to by creating a bilingual flyer that details how to reserve and use the rooms. Distribute these flyers to Spanish-speaking groups in your community.

4.3 Signage

4.3.1 Display bilingual signs prominently and visibly. Display a "welcome" sign at the entrance in Spanish. Pay attention to the particular dialect of Spanish used so that the wording, phraseology, and connotation of the language conform to the cultures of the community

4.3.2 Use international, non-verbal symbols whenever possible, such as the symbol for "information."

4.4 Collection Placement

4.4.1 When space is allocated within existing structures, make collections both visible and accessible to patrons as they enter the library.

4.5 Access

4.5.1 Create bilingual or Spanish translations of library literature that assist in accessing the library and its collections. Examples include: welcome brochures, library maps, guides to using the library, and lists of library resources. Allow Spanish-speaking users to provide input before materials are disseminated. Distribute this library literature to local organizations that serve the Spanish-speaking in your community.

Appendix

Persons of Spanish/Hispanic/Latino origin or descent are those who classified themselves in one of the specific Hispanic or Latino categories listed on the Census 2000 or American Community Survey questionnaire. Categories listed on the 2000 questionnaire include, Mexican, Mexican American, Chicano, Puerto Rican, Cuban or other Spanish/Hispanic/Latino group. According to the US Census Glossary the definition also extends to, "people whose origins are from Spain, the Spanish-speaking countries of Central or South America, the Caribbean, or those identifying themselves generally as Spanish, Spanish-American,

etc. " (Source: U.S. Department of Commerce, U.S. Census Bureau, "American FactFinder Glossary" Available online here. (http://www.census.gov/) (Accessed January 23, 2006)

Origin can be viewed as the ancestry, nationality group, lineage, or country of birth of the person or the person's parents or ancestors before their arrival in the United States. Persons who identify themselves as Spanish, Hispanic, or Latino origin may be of any race. (Source: U.S. Department of Commerce, U.S. Census Bureau, "American FactFinder Glossary," Available online here. (http://www.census.gov/) Accessed January 23, 2006).)

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