



CELEBRATING WELCOMING WEEK: *A Guide for Libraries*



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Introduction

WHAT?

[Welcoming America](#) is 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. Welcoming Week is an annual series of events during one particular week in September when neighbors, newcomers, and long-time residents come together in a spirit of unity. These gatherings demonstrate that in places large and small, people of all backgrounds create stronger communities by building meaningful connections and affirming the benefits of welcoming everyone.

Welcoming Week events are dynamic opportunities to encourage inclusion, dialogue and community-building through potlucks, film festivals, fairs, symposia and other creative efforts. Although there is an annual Welcome Week each year in September, welcoming activities can be included throughout the year to help build support for newcomers as well as to help foster connections among all community members.

WHY?

Welcoming America communities believe that all people, from long-time residents to newly-arrived immigrants, are valued contributors who are vital to the success of our communities and the creation of a shared future of prosperity. Libraries — whether school, public, or academic—all play an important and unique role in helping communities become more welcoming!

WHO?

Welcoming America activities are open to all community members. They provide a wonderful opportunity to gather members of all backgrounds, particularly long-time residents and newcomers, 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. Any organization, library, or business can host a Welcoming America or Welcoming Week activity or event.

WHEN?

Welcoming Week occurs in September every year. For more ideas about how your library and community can be involved with Welcoming Week activities in your community beyond those we have included below, visit: welcomingamerica.org/programs/welcoming-week. You can also register your community or library at that site.

WHERE?

In 2019, over 250 communities held events during Welcoming Week. Large cities and small towns can all play a role in fostering an inclusive environment during Welcoming Week and throughout the year. Events can take place in library buildings themselves, outdoor arenas, local movie theaters, restaurants, shops, museums, or any other public spaces.

Suggested Welcoming Week Activities

Below we have indicated Welcoming Week activities to try in your library based on the types of outcomes you hope to achieve with your event. We encourage you to adapt these programs to your targeted audiences or the broader community.

- **Building partnerships** — collaborating with local organizations to provide services/resources
 - Collaborate with student affinity/diversity groups to host a speaker who focuses on refugee rights
 - Host a Conversation Club or a [Human Library](#)
 - Host a showcase event with local organizations
 - Collaborate with educators on lessons about immigrant and refugee history and rights
 - Meet refugee needs through programs/resources specifically designed for these audiences
 - Online or print resource list sharing school resources for students who identify as immigrants or refugees
 - Know Your Rights sessions and informational materials
 - Hold citizenship test prep workshop
 - Host a public history event to collect community stories about refugees and immigrants to inspire connections and reciprocity
- **Transforming library programs** — re-imagining programming to include diverse voices that foster and promote affinity and inter-connection
 - Host Storytime with immigrant stories
 - Ex. [Tacoma Public Library](#)
 - Book club focused on immigrant stories
 - Reading lists (ex. [Chicago Public Library](#))
 - Book and/or Wall Display of immigrant-centered materials
 - Author/creator visits from those who identify as refugees/asylees
 - Film showing and [discussion of films relating to immigration](#)
- **Developing awareness** — building library and community knowledge of and advocacy for immigrants and refugees
 - Launch digital photo “I stand with immigrants because...” campaign
 - Host Lunch-N-Learns
 - Review and share toolkit and relevant resources
 - Share experiences and resources via social media and library affiliate organizations
 - Post position statement in solidarity with immigrants and refugees

Examples of Welcoming Week Programs

Libraries interested in developing Welcoming Week programming can plan and coordinate using the ideas and examples below. Activities may be targeted for specific desired outcomes and adapted to specific audiences. The selected libraries have held Welcoming Week activities for more than a year and/or have partnered with other organizations in citywide Welcoming Week efforts. We recommend conducting an Internet search to identify additional and current activities.

To learn more about the experience of implementing Welcoming Week activities, several cases are presented in the “Case Studies” on page 10 to demonstrate why libraries are participating in Welcoming Week, activities held, successes, and lessons learned.

- Allegheny County Library Association (Pennsylvania) [2015 initiative](#) | [2016 initiative](#) — connecting with the broader community, including the City of Pittsburgh
- Anchorage Public Library (Alaska) [2015 initiative](#) | [2018 initiative](#) | [2019 initiative](#)
- Beaverton City Library (Oregon) [2017 initiative](#) | [2018 initiative](#) | [2020 Beaverton citywide initiative](#)
- King County Library System (Washington) 2019: [Press release](#) | [blog post](#) | [calendar](#)
- Portland Public Library (Maine) [2017 initiative](#)
- Princeton Public Library (New Jersey) [2019, 4th year of Welcoming Week](#)

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 programs (youth, adult, families)
- [Loleta D. Fyan Grant](#)
Public services in public libraries

- [Innovative Reading Grant](#)
Programs in school libraries, emphasis on struggling readers
- [Carnegie-Whitney Grants](#)
Bibliographic resource development for public use
- [IMLS National Leadership Grants for Libraries](#)
Innovative programming and services
- [HHS Ethnic Community Self-Help Program](#)
Programs for refugee populations by Ethnic Community-Based Organizations (ECBOs)
- [Higher Education and Scholarship in the Humanities](#)
Scholarly support in humanities for refugees

State level

Different state libraries may provide funding and/or resources focused on specific areas. We encourage you to reach out to your state library to see what they can do to improve library services to immigrant and refugee populations.

- [State Library Agency Directory](#) (WI Department of Public Instruction)

Local level

Your local area may also have a wide variety of collaboration partners and funding opportunities. Here are a few examples of where to find support for Welcoming Week-related programming:

- Friends of the Library or other fundraising group
- Local community foundations: Rotary Club; [Community Foundations](#)
- Local businesses; ethnic associations



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. The following section outlines elements of a Welcoming Week strategy as good places to start.

Guidelines and principles for fostering Welcoming Libraries

Libraries should ensure that the needs of immigrants and refugees are considered throughout all library operations. At the ALA Annual Conference 2018, representatives from 5 urban library systems presented the following 5 areas as key elements to consider for a library's strategy:

Partnerships & Politics

Decision-makers may find it helpful to build a narrative that will guide the library's welcoming strategy based on the demographic and the socioeconomic landscape in which the library operates. Questions can include:

- Who are the immigrants and refugees in your community? Where are they from? What are their needs and aspirations?
- What is your institutional structure? What key stakeholders and systems impact your library's resources, including staff and finances? How do key stakeholders perceive immigrants?
- How do immigrants and refugees contribute to the local economy? (e.g., percentage of the labor force, small businesses, Fortune 500 companies)

Additional resources for understanding demographics and building a narrative can be found here: [We Welcome You to Welcome Everyone — Handout Resources](#)

“The principles of Welcoming Week are applicable throughout the year...”

Program & Service Design

Decision-makers can review library programs as well as the policies and guidelines for how staff serve their communities. This includes programs and services such as cultural celebrations, book talks, panel discussions, classes, and storytimes. This also includes service design such as signage around library facilities, website accessibility, representation of diverse populations in displays, etc. Ideas are included below:

- Programming Outreach
 - Language Learning and Citizenship Classes
 - New Americans Corners and Centers
 - e.g., [New Americans Initiative at Los Angeles Public Library](#)
 - [Cultural Inclusivity Services and Plaza Programs at Denver Public Library](#)
 - [The Living Room at Your Library at Houston Public Library](#)
 - [Libraries for Peace Initiative](#)
- Celebration days and months
 - Immigrant Heritage Month (June)
 - City-specific celebrations: Immigrant Heritage Week (NYC — Mid-April), Citizenship month (Nov — Houston)
 - International Mother Language Day (February)
 - National Foreign Language Week (1st week of March)
 - Diversity Month (April)
 - World Refugee Day (June)
 - International Library for Peace Day (September 21)

Marketing & Communication

The library can review how staff communicate with customers and patrons, whether in person, online, on the phone, and through marketing and social media channels. This includes the availability of live language interpretation services for library programs and services for the hearing impaired as well as an evaluation of whether translations of library communications are available in key languages represented in the community.

- Marketing, Web and Social Media resources
 - [Libraries Respond](#)
 - [White, White and Read All Over](#)
 - Denver Public Library:
 - [You are Welcome Here](#)
 - [Mementos from Home](#)

Books & Materials Collection

Libraries can conduct a review and evaluation of the books and materials collection, including online materials, establishing a systematic approach to developing the collection in a way that represents the library's vision for welcoming all individuals and communities. This can include dedicating funding on an annual basis to ensure representation and service for specific communities. The library can also engage the community through a survey or advisory committee to base the library's collection decisions on regular direct feedback from the community. Guidelines include:

- [Diverse Collections: An interpretation of the Library Bill of Rights](#)
- [Measuring Diversity in the Collection](#)
- [Curating an Inclusive and Diverse Collection](#)
- [Building the Collection — Inclusive Collections](#)
- [Can diverse books save us?](#)
- [Beyond the Collection Diversity Audit](#)

Staff Equipping & Recruitment

A critical element to a library's welcoming strategy is its staff. Every contact that a library makes with the community begins with its staff. Many libraries endeavor to hire staff that are representative of the community; it is thus important to review library staff recruitment procedures to ensure that the hiring process reflects the library's commitment to equity, diversity, and inclusion.

- [Recruiting for Diversity](#)
- [Diversity Initiatives to Recruit and Retain Academic Librarians](#)
- [Equitable, Diverse, and Inclusive Staffing](#)

Training and staff equipping is another powerful approach to building a library's welcoming strategy. Staff can be empowered to provide welcoming services through training and tools on how to build common ground across diverse groups, including understanding how one's own background influences the way they design programs and services. The organization can also review the availability of tools and guidelines for staff as they design programs and services.

- Training areas can include the following:
 - Implicit Bias
 - Intersectionality
 - Cultural and Linguistic Competency
 - Being an Effective Ally

Welcoming Week: 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 cases studies represent different 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. It should be noted that the interviews were conducted at the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic and depending on the time held, there was some reference to the possibility of holding virtual activities and no specific reference to safety and social distancing measures for in-person activities that libraries would need to take in planning and implementing Welcoming Week activities in times of crises.



1. When did your library start to celebrate Welcoming Week?

The library began celebrating Welcoming Week in 2016. In the first year, we worked in collaboration with the Princeton Department of Human Services, and the (then) Executive Director, Elisa Neira, who was a fellow with Welcoming America. Princeton had just been officially designated as a Welcoming America town thanks to the efforts of our colleague, Elisa. She reached out to the library to help plan and promote events for Welcoming Week due to our longstanding relationship and collaboration on other events and programs.

2. What is the library’s goal(s) or reason for doing this?

The Princeton Public Library strives to be welcoming to every member of our community year round. During Welcoming Week we like to highlight the many ways in which our strengths as a community and a library come through our diversity. In particular, we focus on the ways in which the library is an integral part of making people welcome in the community through our public programming, particularly English Conversation Classes, citizenship preparation courses, and the Community ID Card program. It is one thing to say you are welcoming, it is another to (metaphorically) take them by the hand and invite them in.

3. What types of activities do you do during this week? and why?



Since we first started in 2016, the number of events has grown as has the number of organizations. The town and other non-profit organizations host a wide variety of events and the library is an integral part of the planning, promotion and support of all the events. Below are some of the events that the library has either presented itself or in collaboration with others. There are some staples every year, and a variety of events that differ from year to year.

Naturalization Ceremony

We work with the Department of Homeland Security, United States Citizenship and Immigration Services, to see if they can do a scheduled Naturalization Ceremony at the library. Each year, we select 20-30 Princeton area residents who have secured citizenship and invite them to join the naturalization ceremony at the library.

- This can be particularly meaningful for residents since some of them may have gotten help through library programs like the Citizenship Preparation Course or Ask a Lawyer (which we are able to offer in partnership with others).

Cultural Heritage Fair

People showcase food/clothing/art/crafts that represent their family's cultural heritage.

- The elementary schools also do a variation of this, but it is fun for people to have the opportunity to show off their cultural heritage and for the community to see a sampling of some of the many cultures that make Princeton such a wonderful place.

World Map

One year Councilwoman Fraga put a world map on a board and encouraged people to put a pin on the country that their family came from.

- We didn't really have specific expectations around this but it was wonderful to see not only how many parts of the map were covered, but one young attendee was filled with total wonder to see how far his grandparents had come.

Walking Tour

We have invited people to come on an historical walking tour of the Witherspoon Jackson neighborhood which has been sustained by the African American population but has also been home to many transitioning communities.

- This is important on a number of levels. It highlights a local history that doesn't get as much attention as, say Albert Einstein (n.b. Einstein spent a lot of time in the Witherspoon Jackson neighborhood!) and it also shows how different groups, Jewish people, Italian people, Polish people, and others came into the Witherspoon Jackson neighborhood and transitioned into the community.

Proclamation

Each year the mayor, or others on her behalf, has read a Mayoral proclamation about Welcoming Week.

- To emphasize that this is a town-wide, top to bottom, celebration and endeavor.

Potluck

We have 10–12 volunteer-led English Conversation Groups. These groups meet weekly and require no registration. We invite these groups and the public to come together for a party and people can bring food to share. Generally this is food that they feel represents their countries of origin or cultural heritage, but sometimes people order pizza.

Other programs

- Film screening and post screening Q&A (various films have been shown over the years)
- Author Talks
- Art Exhibit
- Lotería (a Mexican game similar to bingo)

During our first year the Department of Human Services worked with a group of students who interviewed a number of business owners who immigrated to the U.S. to learn their stories.

The Department of Human Services hosts a calendar of all Welcoming Week events on their website.

4. What has been successful?

Everything has been successful in one way or another, but our particular favorite is certainly the Naturalization Ceremony. It's meaningful for many of the people who have secured citizenship to be able to do so in a place that is so meaningful in the community. It is also really moving and fascinating for people in the community to hear the oath that our newest citizens take in order to become U.S. Citizens, and to support and welcome them. In 2019, the League of Women Voters had a table so that people could immediately register to vote if they were so inclined and it was a welcome addition.

The map that I noted above was also a really easy and successful program.

The collaborations of community partners has helped make the programming so successful. It is also best to highlight an already existing program, and not necessarily plan to recreate new events just for this week.

5. What has not worked and you would do differently or not at all?

In an effort to invite more businesses and organizations we had a Welcoming Week breakfast, where we explained the concept of Welcoming Week and had groups work together to try and identify ways in which they might participate. Instead of calling people together, we now just send out reminders with some suggestions about things that potential partners can consider if they would like to participate. It was good to have a community meeting, but I think making specific tasks and suggestions might be more helpful for some folks.

There is a tension in celebrating diversity and highlighting people who have come to the U.S. through immigration — which is the thrust of many of the Welcoming America activities, and at the same time acknowledging that the United States of America was built on subjugation/erasure/eradication of Indigenous/Native/American Indian peoples and the enslavement of African American peoples. Along the same line, it is important to acknowledge all groups of people who have been othered or overlooked in our society (e.g., LGBTQIA+, neurodiverse, and differently-abled groups). We need to find ways to ensure that everyone is welcomed and their contributions celebrated, generally in society and within Welcoming Week.

6. What plans do you have for this year?

This is a great question since we aren't sure what public programming will look like during the fall. We had scheduled the naturalization ceremony. Our planning meeting with Human Services has been temporarily postponed. One of the things that we had planned to discuss was how to make it more inclusive. I would also note that the Department of Human Services organized a Welcoming America presentation for schools and we hope to include them in the discussions. A lot of the schools are doing really great work to ensure that each child is welcomed, seen, and celebrated.

7. What message would you provide to libraries (public, school, special or university) to get engaged?

This is a time of celebration and there are so many ways that we can celebrate the strength that comes in diversity. From passive programming like book and bulletin board displays to bigger more elaborate programs like a cultural heritage fair. Collaborate with others — it is important to have your own programming — but what makes good, solid, diverse communities is when everyone works together. This helps amplify everyone's contributions. More importantly, we try to make sure that we are welcoming, inclusive and respectful of all cultures in all we do all year long. Welcoming Week just provides us with the opportunity to highlight our everyday work.

8. Is there someone in your library who would be a good contact if another library wanted more information?

- [Janie Hermann](#), Adult Program Manager

Other integral team members outside the library have been:

- [Melissa Urias](#), Executive Director of the Department of Human Services
- Councilwoman [Leticia Fraga](#)

Note: Kim Dorman, Community Engagement Coordinator, was interviewed for this case study.

Resources:

- Articles in Town Topics: [2019 Welcoming Week](#) | “[NewCitizens Help Celebrate Welcoming Week](#)”
- Photos: [Pictures of our 2017 Naturalization Ceremony](#)
- Welcoming Week Calendars on the municipal website: [2019](#) | [2018](#)





CASE #2 — Denver Public Library

1. When did your library start to celebrate Welcoming Week?

Denver Public Library (PDL) started celebrating Welcoming Week in 2017.

2. What is the library's goal(s) or reason for doing this?

We wanted to purposefully target a community that has been historically underserved in libraries. We wanted to create a series of programs that would promote cultural diversity and at the same time help create a space in libraries where our immigrant community would feel connected.

3. What types of activities do you do during this week? and why?

In past years, we didn't just have a Welcoming Week at DPL, we had a Welcoming Month! With over 26 departments and library branches participating in a Welcoming Week activity, we wanted to host as many programs as possible and allow various communities to join in the celebration. Denver is a vibrantly diverse city and each DPL branch serves multiple populations that have unique individual and collective needs. Some branches serve predominantly white demographics while other branches serve various communities of color. The library programs that were hosted in previous years served two purposes, educating the public and celebrating our differences. All of the programs were designed with the aim of building common ground among Denver's community members. Programs such as panels, documentary screenings, art exhibitions showcasing immigrant and refugee artists, and community workshops on implicit bias and microaggressions were hosted at branches in predominantly white neighborhoods. Branches in more diverse areas hosted dance and music programs, art-making workshops, and international food and coffee exhibitions. Some branches that couldn't host really big or busy programs opted for more passive programs like card making programs. I'm not able to list all of the programs that we have had in the past but I can provide them if needed.

“...we didn't just have a Welcoming Week at DPL, we had a Welcoming Month!”



WELCOMING WEEK

Welcoming Week brings together immigrant, refugee, and native-born Denver residents to celebrate the diversity of our city. Show the world you welcome.

Film: Children of Heaven (1997)

PG, English subtitles

Sunday, Sept. 8, 1:30-4 p.m.

Central Library | 10 W. 14th Ave. Pkwy. | Conference Center

Writer and director Majid Majidi captures the best of cinematic neorealism with his tale of a brother's loyalty and love for his sister and family. The first Iranian film to be nominated for an Oscar for Best Foreign Language Film.

Dance Performance with Deepali

Sunday, Sept. 8, 2-3 p.m.

Sam Gary | 2961 Roslyn St. 80238

Saturday, Sept. 14, 2-3 p.m.

Woodbury | 3265 Federal Blvd. 80211

Tuesday, Sept. 17, 5-6 p.m.

Ford-Warren | 2825 High St. 80205

Community Art Mural: Fingerprint Peace Dove

Sunday, Sept 15, 2-3 p.m.

Green Valley Ranch | 4856 N. Andes Ct. 80249

Show the world that you welcome by joining members of the library community in creating a beautiful work of art that speaks of peace and love. All ages welcome.

Mural Painting

Monday, Sept. 16, 3-5 p.m.

Ross-Cherry Creek | 305 Milwaukee St. 80206

What does a welcoming community mean to you? Drop by and help us paint a canvas mural showing that, no matter where you are from, you're welcome here!

International Comfort Foods

Monday, Sept. 16, 5-6 p.m.

Hadley | 1890 S. Grove St. 80219

4. What has been successful?

All of the DPL Welcoming Week programs have been successful. Each year, we are able to offer more programs and that means more people joining in the fun and community building. Our approach to program design and implementation begins with the community members themselves. Planning for Welcoming Week starts in January where I meet with each branch programming lead to discuss community needs and expectations. With their valuable insight, we were able to create and implement successful programs.

5. What has not worked and you would do differently or not at all?

2019 Welcoming Week programming provided us with some valuable insights causing us to rethink our approach to offering Welcoming Week programs. Addressing participant expectations resulted in a challenge. Some participants came to Welcoming Week programs with the hope of meeting some diverse people and verbally welcoming them to the library and to Denver. Some participants had a desire to ask people where they came from. While there was no malicious intent with these expectations and desires, the impact of these actions, had they actually happened, could have been very damaging to everyone involved. Members of immigrant and refugee communities are not tokens meant to alleviate white guilt and satisfy a savior complex. You can't expect someone to tell you their life story during an hour-long period. Trust must be built and that could take years. Participants were very confused with the goal of Welcoming Week.

6. What plans do you have for this year?

Due to last year's lessons, I wanted to be very intentional and strategic when offering Welcoming Week programs in 2020. I've even debated if I wanted to call them Welcoming Week programs. Going back and studying previous Welcoming Week programs, one thing became abundantly clear to me. Library spaces are not neutral spaces no matter how much we wish them to be. By default, library spaces are white spaces and the majority of library programs cater to white culture. This power imbalance is what contributed to the expectations of wanting to meet and welcome people of color. To create equitable and truly welcoming programs, we have to address and shift that power. Instead of members of immigrant and refugee communities being tokenized to meet the needs and expectations of members of the dominant culture, we must create programs where that power is redistributed.

I want to design library programs that allow communities of color to reclaim and utilize library space as their own. Because of COVID19, many library systems have converted to virtual programming which creates many inequitable barriers to many underserved library customers. I am still navigating what that might mean for Welcoming Week programming this year.

7. What message would you provide to libraries (public, school, special or university) to get engaged?

Own voices and authentic representation is really important. Have different perspectives when creating these programs and have fun with them. "No one knows everything, together we know a whole lot" is something I take to heart.

8. Is there someone in your library who would be a good contact if another library wanted more information?

I am the main contact for all Culturally Inclusive programming including Welcoming Week. I welcome any and all questions and would be happy to help. [Naghem Swade](#), Cultural Exchange Services Coordinator

Resources:

- [Welcoming Week Page](#)
- [Culturally Inclusive Services Page](#)

“Library spaces are not neutral spaces no matter how much we wish them...”



1. When did your library start to celebrate Welcoming Week?

We hope to start Welcoming Week in 2020, but a revised timeline may push events to 2021.

2. What is the library's goal(s) or reason for doing this?

Being a welcoming space for immigrants is a pillar of building social trust and increasing opportunities for civic engagement.

3. What types of activities do you do during this week? and why?

We're still in the planning stages.

4. What has been successful?

Our hope is that the Welcoming Week initiative will be transformative and healing for Los Angeles residents.

5. What has not worked and you would do differently or not at all?

When working on planning a uniform event for a large system, it's important to remember that all neighborhoods and branches are not uniform and adjustments may need to be made.

6. What plans do you have for this year?

We are considering creating Welcoming Week with World Refugee Day in June so we can capitalize on partner and local government involvement to bring attention to international-born residents in Los Angeles. If an online environment is our best option, we may look to host watch parties for movies that highlight the refugee and immigrant experience.

7. What message would you provide to libraries (public, school, special or university) to get engaged?

Be bold and be overly inclusive. The library welcomes everyone. Make sure everyone sees and feels this.

8. Is there someone in your library who would be a good contact if another library wanted more information?

[Madeleine Ildefonso](#), Managing Librarian, Office of Civics and Community Services

“America’s immigrants
are a strong and
valuable part of the
social fabric of this
nation...”

—Resolution in Support of Immigrant Rights,
American Library Association
2007

