

No-Nonsense Tips for Community Outreach: Connecting with Multicultural Communities

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Immigrants have been in our communities for decades, yet we are still asking the question “how do we connect with multicultural communities?”

One reason we are still asking the question is that we haven’t done the **foundational work** of connecting with immigrants in meaningful ways, beyond the basics.

Nor have we taken multicultural outreach ***to the next level.***

When a sector or service provider doesn't go beyond the basics, services become, & remain, performative, tokenistic, checking off boxes, paying lip service.

Some examples of basic services in the library sector include:

Conversation circles, ELL book clubs, multilingual collections, celebrations like Diwali, Lunar New Year, Black History Month. Yes, these are all important, & should continue but they’re hardly creative any longer.

Helping newcomers actually *integrate* and be successful means far more than offering conversation circles or a few days of simplified cultural showcases. **It’s helping them feel like they belong.**

It’s:

- acknowledging frustrations about issues that they’re facing, such as lack of credential recognition
- empowering them to deal with anxieties over racism by helping them learn how to effectively respond to racism
- ensuring they know that they do *not* have to put up with discrimination of any kind
That ‘putting up with it’, is not a price they must pay for being here.

They belong here.

Let's get out of our comfort zones, & get training ourselves on dynamic, effective cross-cultural communication. On truly connecting with distinct communities & cultures, such as:

- Black populations from diverse diasporas- American, British, Caribbean, African, who have settled in our communities
- various & varied Asian, Hispanic, & Latinx population
- international LGBTQTSI+ communities
- migrant workers
 - smaller language groups
- int'l students

Foundational work also involves:

- Telling immigrants-in plain language- how libraries work.
- How libraries are funded with their tax dollars, & that they have the right to make suggestions, give feedback, attend library board meetings, and make us accountable, those of us working in the libraries.

Give them reasons to build relationships with library staff, whether inside or outside the library.

That's taking it to the next level!

And- if all this seems intimidating, it is!

To be very clear: foundational work is ***work***; these are multipronged, ongoing processes with many steps.

Tips for foundational work to connect with multicultural communities:

1. **Speak up, take a stand, & advocate** for this foundational work.
2. **Hire librarians & library workers who reflect multicultural communities**, who speak their language, and who have lived experience of their culture/s, concerns, interests, perspectives, & priorities.

Let these workers lead, pay them well, & have other staff support & accompany them. Acknowledge their work and the skills they bring to it.

How can you have a meaningful, sustainable relationship with people if you don't speak their language?

99% of the question, "How do we connect with newcomers"? can be answered by *hiring BIPOC to lead the work!*

3. **Have a team of staff who can support BIPOC leaders doing this work**
 - who themselves are responsible & accountable for doing parts of the work
 - this team of staff should be given time and resources so that they're not working off the side of their desks.

In other words, have an integrated, full-fledged, dedicated Multicultural Services department or whatever you want to call it.

4. **Have a written, detailed action plan, specifying:**
 - what outreach needs to be done
 - when, where, by & with whom
 - What are the goals/outcomes?
 - Are they realistically achievable? If not, why not? How can they be made achievable?

To be meaningful, this work must be done *intentionally, consistently, & systematically*. Goals/outcomes will progressively change, & be adapted as needed.

5. **Have a proportionate budget.**

Are we spending even close to what we should be spending on services & outreach for newcomers?
6. **Make good use of community partners**, such as settlement agencies.

Having strong, trusting relationships with community partners goes a long way in making foundational work easier, & also, much more impactful. Community-based

agencies have a wealth of often-untapped knowledge & experience that we can both leverage & share.

Related to that, let's have more collaboration between libraries! Take advantage of online platforms, of the different experiences of library staff from places & cultures very different from ours.

With no geographical boundaries, why can't we offer joint programs?

7. **Try new things.**

In Surrey we successfully connected with the Somali community in partnership with a settlement agency, and it's now become a template for us to connect with other under-served language groups.

We also offer basic anti-racism/cross-cultural workshops in Spanish

Of course, don't expect success every time-but do keep trying! With each effort, & outcome, ideas of what's considered 'successful' may change.

8. **Share your outreach processes, successes, & challenges!**

With your colleagues, peers, managers, the Board, etc. This reiterates that *newcomers & refugees are important patrons*, & that all this work is worthwhile. Share through reports, emails, presentations, social media, blogs, photos-whatever's appropriate & is a good fit for you.

Immigrants are here. They're not going anywhere. If we don't do this work meaningfully, we as a sector, and our libraries are going to be left behind.