

# **MULTICULTURAL COMMUNITIES**

## **Guidelines for Library Services**

**2<sup>nd</sup> edition, revised**

International Federation of Library Associations and Institutions (IFLA)  
Section on Library Services to Multicultural Populations

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Section on Library Services to Multicultural Populations

This publication was compiled by Anne Holmes and Derek Whitehead for the Section on Library Services to Multicultural Populations in 1987 and updated by Virginia Ballance and Marie F. Zielinska in 1996.

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## INTRODUCTION

These guidelines are based on Standards for multicultural public library service compiled by the Working Group on Multicultural Library Services (Victoria) and published in August 1982 by the Working Group and the Library Council of Victoria, Australia.

They were compiled for the IFLA Section on Library Services to Multicultural Populations by a Standards Subcommittee consisting of Anne Holmes and Derek Whitehead in consultation with all members of the Standing Committee of the Section. The Standards were translated into all official languages of IFLA (French, German, Russian and Spanish). In addition they were translated into Chinese, Japanese and Italian and widely distributed by the Section.

The development of electronic media and introduction of new forms of transmitting information created the necessity to revise the guidelines. This was done by Virginia Ballance and Marie Zielinska in consultation with all members of the Standing Committee of the Section. Benedikte Kragh-Schwartz and Charles Townley helped to prepare the final version.

# MULTICULTURAL COMMUNITIES:

## Guidelines for Library Service

These guidelines have been compiled and published in order to promote standards of fairness and equity in library service to ethnic, linguistic and cultural minorities. The guidelines

- provide criteria against which the adequacy of existing services may be assessed;
- provide a basis for the planning of library services to all groups in the community;
- provide an equitable basis for the purchase of materials and the provision of services;

and we believe that their implementation will also

- encourage mutual understanding and tolerance among the ethnic, linguistic and cultural groups represented in all societies.

It is not intended that these guidelines should be taken in isolation from other standards and guidelines. In particular, they are meant to be used in conjunction with standards and guidelines for particular types of libraries in each country and with international standards. It is intended that the central principle of these guidelines, that of equity, should be used in applying existing standards and guidelines for public, school, academic and other libraries.

It is also important that library services to ethnic, linguistic and cultural minorities should not be seen in isolation or as additional to "normal" services. They must be seen as integral to any library service.

## Ethnic, Linguistic and Cultural Diversity

These guidelines are international, but the ethnic, linguistic and cultural composition of the countries of the world varies greatly. This variety can be characterized in the following way:

1. Immigrant minorities. In this category are included permanent settlers who possess their own language(s) and culture(s) which are distinct from those of the host society. The category also includes the descendants of immigrants who continue to identify with their ancestral culture.
2. Persons seeking asylum, refugees and residents with a temporary stay permit.
3. Migrant workers. In this category, temporary immigrant workers and their dependants are included. They are immigrants who do not intend to stay permanently, and whose legal status is that of temporary resident. They may eventually become permanent residents (category 1), depending upon the policies of their country of residence and their own wishes.
4. National minorities. These are indigenous or long-established groups with a long-standing and distinct ethnic, linguistic or cultural identity, distinct from that of the majority. They may use the main language of the country (such as the Swedes of Finland), or have substantially adopted the main language of the country (such as the Welsh or the Native Americans). National minorities may share their language or culture with majorities in adjoining countries, or may be confined to the country in which they are a minority.
5. A global society. In the global society we are all part of cultural minorities. All cultures must be represented in the global information infrastructure.

Dialect is also a relevant factor. In many countries that are regarded as linguistically relatively homogeneous, there is a wide variation in dialects used, and there may exist vigorous dialect and regional cultures. Where material is available in these dialects or relating to regional cultures, libraries should acquire

it.

These guidelines are intended to be applied in a variety of situations of ethnic, linguistic and cultural diversity, and amplify the section of the 1986 IFLA Guidelines for public libraries on service to ethnic and linguistic minorities. These are printed as an appendix to this document.

## **Interpretation**

As a general principle, these guidelines have maintained the belief that library service should be provided to all ethnic, linguistic and cultural groups at the same level, and according to the same standards. For a number of reasons, this may not always be possible. However, it is particularly important that this principle be maintained as a primary goal.

In the guidelines that follow, it is strongly urged that all ethnic, linguistic and cultural minorities be provided with library materials and access to networked information services, in their preferred languages and reflecting their own cultures, on an equitable basis. The following points should be used in applying this principle.

1. Where the language of an ethnic minority is not an official language of the country, a great amount of country-specific material will only exist in the official language; for example, material relating to the law, government, education and business. This should be taken into account in assessing whether provision is equitable.
2. The volume of material published in many minority languages may make it impossible to provide library materials to the same standards as for the majority language. It is unavoidable in such cases that provision will be less adequate in range, balance, collection size or physical quality for a language in which little is published. It may be possible to provide a different balance of library materials, but for some minorities, despite the best efforts of library staff, an inevitable inequality may remain.
3. The degree of bilingualism and of retention of linguistic or cultural identity, and the level of social integration within a society will also be important in determining the level of service to ethnic, linguistic or cultural minorities. Many members of minorities may wish to be regarded as part of other groups in their library needs. These factors should be considered in deciding what is a fair and equitable provision of library services.
4. Demand is also relevant, and for a variety of reasons demand may not correspond to the proportion of the population in a particular ethnic, linguistic or cultural minority. Therefore demand cannot be taken into account where no service has been previously provided. Low demand may reflect inadequate provision in the past, poor or inappropriate service, low expectations, poor publicity or unfamiliarity with library services. In such a case the reasons for lack of or low level of demand should be thoroughly investigated before any decision on the service is taken.
5. All ethnic, linguistic and cultural minorities should be provided with collections and services which meet equitable standards of library provision. In the case of very small minorities, or widely scattered groups, such materials and services may need to be provided on a central or cooperative basis in order to achieve a service of a size, range and quality comparable with that provided for larger groups or for the population as a whole.
6. In global networked library systems, all cultures and languages must have access to and be able to participate in the global network.

# GUIDELINES

Library service should be provided to all ethnic, linguistic and cultural groups in society equitably and without discrimination.

## 1. — Responsibility for Provision

1.1 The funding and provision of library services to ethnic, linguistic and cultural minorities is a responsibility of all library authorities, whether public, state, national, school, academic or other; and of both central and local government.

1.2 Effective service for ethnic, linguistic and cultural minorities will normally require that, where it is possible, some services are provided centrally. The following functions are appropriate activities of bodies responsible for the control or coordination of library services.

- (a) The determination of standards for library service to ethnic, linguistic and cultural minorities, both centrally and locally, and in conjunction with the determination of library standards generally.
- (b) The promotion of equitable standards of library service and of principles and policies of library service which fairly reflect multicultural and non-racial principles.
- (c) The collection and dissemination of accurate statistics relevant to the application of these guidelines and of national standards.
- (d) The compilation and distribution of information relating to existing collections for **ethnic**, linguistic and cultural minorities in all types of libraries.
- (e) The evaluation, in consultation with minority communities, of the application of guidelines, standards and policies.
- (f) The provision of collections of material in minority languages and for minority ethnic and cultural groups, either for circulation among individual libraries or for direct services to the public. This should particularly be the case where, because of the small size or scattered population of a minority group, individual libraries are unable to provide an adequate level of service.
- (g) The provision of material in all formats and from multiple sources.
- (h) The provision of central technical services including the selection, acquisition and cataloguing of materials for minority groups and the provision of union catalogues in electronic or printed form, of such materials. Multilingual materials should be reported to such national union catalogues thereby ensuring equal access to local holdings for all.
- (i) The provision of advisory and consultative services to libraries with regard to services to ethnic, linguistic and cultural minorities; and provision of forums for regular consultation with ethnic, linguistic and cultural minority communities.
- (j) The support and encouragement of publishing in minority languages and publishing of material by or about members of minority groups.
- (k) The promotion of libraries and their services to ethnic, linguistic and cultural minorities beyond the borders of any single library service.
- (l) The conducting and sponsoring of research into the future needs and library use of members of ethnic, linguistic and cultural minorities.
- (m) The maintenance of professional and international exchange relations with libraries, publishers and other relevant bodies in the mother countries of minority groups.

(n) The development of on-line databases for materials and the promulgation and implementation of international standards for the exchange of data in non-Roman scripts.

1.3 The following functions are appropriate activities of individual libraries and library authorities.

(a) Each individual library should clearly state goals, objectives and policies relating to its services to ethnic, linguistic and cultural minorities and these should be allocated a place within its overall system of priorities. Such a local multicultural services plan will act as guide to staff and explanation to users.

(b) Individual libraries should adopt policies of clear commitment to non-discrimination and anti-racism.

(c) Each individual library service should continuously assess the nature and needs of its community, in consultation with ethnic, linguistic and cultural minority groups, and should base service upon such assessments and consultations.

(d) While recognizing that many will be formed by democratic process, an attempt should be made to ensure that the composition of governing or advisory bodies of libraries, such as boards of trustees or library committees, should reflect the composition of the community served.

(e) Libraries serving significant numbers of people belonging to an ethnic, linguistic or cultural minority should make local provision for that group of users.

(f) All ethnic, linguistic and cultural minorities should be provided with an equitable level of library service, and initiatives should be taken at regional or national level to ensure that small or widely scattered minorities are adequately served; for example, by central circulating collections, or by the formation of cooperative networks, or by the provision of joint services by neighboring libraries.

## **2. — Library Materials**

2.1 Library materials should be provided for all, in their preferred languages and relating to their own cultures.

(a) An effective, balanced and substantial collection should be maintained for each ethnic, linguistic and cultural minority group.

(b) The provision of library materials for members of minority groups should be related to the size of the group and its reading needs.

(c) Such provision should be at the same per capita level as for the population in general. However, it should be recognized that for small groups, a higher per capita provision than is generally applied may be necessary in order to provide an effective and equitable service.

(d) Library materials provided for ethnic, linguistic and cultural minorities should include both materials published within the country of residence and elsewhere.

(e) Library materials reflecting the experiences and interests of the minority group, and intended for use by them should include materials published in the majority or official language where that is used or understood by members of the minority group.

(f) Library materials should include material in languages widely used as second languages.

2.2 Periodicals and newspapers provided for ethnic, linguistic and cultural minorities should be provided at least at the same per capita level as for the general population.

2.3 Books, including books with large print, provided for ethnic, linguistic and cultural minorities should be provided at least at the same per capita level as for the general population.

2.4 Sound recordings are an integral part of library service to minority groups, and should be provided at least at the same per capita level as for the general population.

2.5 Digital information and video recordings have become an essential part of library service and should be provided for, at the same per capita level as for the general population. Videos should be available in the local national standard format.

2.6 When national copyright laws restrict the use of videos and other materials in electronic format for public lending, negotiations with copyright holders should take place at a national level.

2.7 It is appropriate and desirable for libraries to provide other materials than those specified above. Such materials include laser discs, CD-ROM products, maps, pictures and projected media. Where such provision is made, the materials provided should cater for all ethnic, linguistic and cultural groups within the community.

2.8 Libraries with networked databases or web sites should assure global access to these services.

2.9 Where there is a lack of any one type of library material, the increased provision of other appropriate materials or services should be considered as an alternative.

2.10 Where there is a lack of print material or a low reading level in a minority community, or a significant level of illiteracy, non-print materials, in particular sound and video recordings, should be emphasized if they are available.

### **3. — Cross-Cultural Materials and Services**

3.1 Libraries should aim, in acquiring materials, to reflect the ethnic, linguistic and cultural composition of society and to foster racial harmony and equality.

(a) Library materials acquired should enable access in the minority user's own language to other cultures.

(b) Library materials should include material in the majority language relating to the linguistic minorities and their countries of origin.

3.2 Libraries should encourage and cater to language learning, with particular emphasis on students not affiliated with any educational agency, and libraries should work closely with local educational agencies so that the best possible provision is made.

(a) Libraries should provide materials, which will facilitate learning of the national language(s) and other languages.

(b) Such material should be in minority languages as well as in the national language(s) and should include all appropriate media, including the use of computers with literacy software.

(c) Libraries should promote or co-sponsor classes to assist the newly arrived immigrants adjust to their new country on such topics as citizenship, employment, social services etc.

(d) Libraries should conduct, promote or co-sponsor classes for learners of the national language(s) and other languages.

(e) Libraries should promote the dissemination of knowledge about minority groups and their cultures.

3.3 Libraries should participate in the life of the community by involvement and initiative in local events such as cultural activities, festivals, and the commemorations of the various ethnic, linguistic and cultural groups in the area.

## **4. — Information and Reference Services**

4.1 Libraries should provide a reference and information service in those languages most commonly used, and to those groups with greatest need, such as recently arrived immigrant groups.

(a) It is particularly important that community information, involving data for everyday decision-making, should, where possible, be provided in the language of the user.

4.2 The same range and quality of service should be available to persons seeking inter-library loans and specific title or subject requests in all languages and for all ethnic and cultural groups.

4.3 Signposting in libraries should be in the languages of the main user groups or, where appropriate, should use international non-verbal symbols.

4.4 Enrollment forms, overdue notices, reservation forms, rules, guides to use of the library and other forms of communication between the library and its users should, where possible, be in the languages of users.

4.5 Promotional material, such as lists of resources, should be provided in the languages of, and reflecting the interests of, members of ethnic, linguistic and cultural minority groups.

## **5. — Technical Services**

5.1 In order to make the best use of scarce resources, to prevent duplication, and to use financial resources economically, selection, acquisition and cataloguing of materials in minority languages should be carried out centrally or cooperatively wherever or whenever possible.

5.2 The cataloguing of materials in all languages should, where practically possible, be to the same standard as that of material in the main language(s) of the country.

(a) Cataloguing of all library materials should, where practically possible, be in the original language and script; subject access in the national language(s) may be provided additionally for the use of library staff, together with transliteration where necessary.

(b) Libraries using automated systems should ensure that their systems are capable of maintaining data in scripts other than that used for the national language; and that the data conforms to internationally recognized standards thereby facilitating the exchange of automated records. Library patrons should have access to these databases via the library's public access catalogues.

(c) The production and maintenance of union catalogues, in print or electronic form, for all languages is an important element in an equitable national or regional service, in order to facilitate cooperation and enable specific title and subject requests to be met.

5.3 Collections should be maintained so that they are as current as possible.

(a) New material should be acquired regularly in all languages and for all ethnic and cultural minority groups.

(b) Out of date and worn-out material should be weeded regularly, and discarded material dealt with according to its potential usefulness.

(c) Where central collections exist, discarded material should first be offered to these collections.

(d) Care should be taken through such measures as rebinding, purchase of multiple copies and other methods to ensure that the physical quality of stock for all groups is adequate.

## **6. — Extension Services**

6.1 The promotion, encouragement and support of literacy and of literacy programs is an appropriate function for libraries, and should include both literacy in the national language(s) and in other languages.

6.2 Social and cultural community activities organized by the library, such as story-telling, concerts, drama and exhibitions, should be directed towards all ethnic, linguistic and cultural groups.

6.3 Library service to persons unable to use the library personally should be provided in the preferred language of the user, and should be offered to all ethnic, linguistic and cultural groups; these include services to the housebound, to hospitals, and to correctional institutions.

6.4 Extension activities of libraries should be conducted in the preferred languages of users; such services include those to factories and other workplaces, and service to ethnic community organizations.

6.5 Provision of library service to ethnic, linguistic and cultural minorities, including information services, should be in alternative, familiar locations where possible.

## **7. — Staffing**

7.1 Libraries should reflect multicultural societies by the staff they employ, ensuring that the staff truly reflects the different ethnic, cultural and linguistic groups that the library serves. Libraries should implement positive action strategies to ensure that people from ethnic, cultural and linguistic minorities are aware of employment opportunities that exist.

7.2 Library authorities should encourage the employment of people with relevant linguistic and cultural knowledge, skills and abilities.

(a) Appropriate means of doing so include the adoption of local employment policies, creation of specific positions, and use of interns, trainees or cadetships.

(b) It is important that linguistic and cultural characteristics be appropriate for the tasks for which a person is employed, and that libraries recognize the wide range of categories of ability. These include oral fluency, reading skills, writing skills, familiarity with the general culture, and high-level formal education within the culture or any combination of these.

7.3 Library authorities should institute continuing education programs designed to enrich the cultural and racial awareness of their staff and improve their abilities in dealing with their tasks in an ethnically, linguistically or culturally diverse society.

7.4 Library schools should encourage people of ethnic, linguistic and cultural minority background to undertake courses in librarianship and related areas.

(a) Library schools should ensure that all courses deal with the issues involved for library staff in an ethnically, linguistically or culturally diverse society.

7.5 The cooperative use of library staff with appropriate expertise should be encouraged.

## **8. — Special Groups**

8.1 The needs of individuals vary greatly according to age and circumstances. Multicultural library service should take account of this and make particular provision for the needs of special groups.

# APPENDIX

## **IFLA Guidelines for Public Libraries, 1986 (pgs. 22-24)**

### **\*Services to ethnic and linguistic minorities**

Ethnic and linguistic minorities may be unable to make full use of the public library services generally available. They are often unable to read the language of the community in which they are living and many may be weak readers even in their own languages. They also have additional needs as a result of their different cultural patterns and problems of harmonizing with the majority community. Many, also, are likely to be at a disadvantage socially and financially compared with the rest of the community. For all these reasons, they need special services from the public library.

1.73 Public libraries should take positive steps to identify the needs and problems of ethnic and linguistic minorities, in their own area, provide requisite materials and services and encourage their use.

1.74 Central organizations with responsibility for libraries can assist by establishing liaison with relevant national bodies which represent the interests of minority groups.

1.75 Local leaders of minority groups should be approached to ensure their understanding of the libraries' services, and to enlist their cooperation in encouraging their use.

1.76 The employment, even part-time, of staff with appropriate linguistic abilities is very desirable.

1.77 Materials, including newspapers, in minority languages, often have to be obtained from their countries of origin. National organizations or specialist booksellers may be able to assist in this, or several library systems with similar needs may arrange to act collectively.

1.78 When several small minority communities have a need for printed or audiovisual materials in the same language, it will often be inefficient for each library to try to satisfy their needs individually, each with its own very limited range of materials. Cooperative arrangements to circulate a wider range of materials among the several library systems concerned may be more satisfactory. Alternatively national loan collection of such material might be established to supplement local holdings.

1.79 Information sheets in minority languages, describing the library services and other local facilities, need to be produced and distributed, mainly through the groups' own community organizations. With encouragement and assistance from the library, these and other publications might be produced by members of the minority community themselves.

1.80 Children from minority groups face particular difficulties if they are to live

happily within an alien community without losing their own cultural heritage. Libraries need to be aware of this danger, and provide adequate materials about the history and culture of the countries from which immigrant groups have come, and books and periodicals for children in their own languages.

1.81 Ethnic minorities can enrich the life of the communities in which they live by preserving their cultural traditions and continuing as far as possible to practice their own customs. The public library can assist in both these processes by promoting performances and exhibitions of traditional life and culture.

1.82 The majority group within each community may need help in understanding the different cultures and backgrounds of the minority groups in their midst. For these too the public library is a main source of information and guidance”.