



Multicultural Communities: Guidelines for Library Services

An Overview

This document provides an overview of *Multicultural Communities: Guidelines for Library Services*, 3rd Edition, 2009. For the complete text of the guidelines, please visit: <http://www.ifla.org/publications/multicultural-communities-guidelines-for-library-services-3rd-edition>

These guidelines promote fairness and equity of access in library services to multicultural communities. They provide a basis for the planning of library services to all groups in the community; criteria against which existing multicultural services may be assessed; an equitable basis for the acquisition of materials and the provision of services; and they encourage understanding and engagement among the multicultural groups represented in all societies.

1. The Multicultural Library

Each individual in our global society has the right to a full range of library and information services. In addressing cultural and linguistic diversity, libraries should:

- serve all members of the community without discrimination based on cultural and linguistic heritage
- provide information in appropriate languages and scripts
- give access to a broad range of materials and services reflecting all communities and needs
- employ staff to reflect the diversity of the community, who are trained to work with and serve diverse communities

Decisions on service level provision need to be based upon community analysis and needs assessment. Libraries need to pay particular attention to the culturally diverse groups in their communities, including Indigenous peoples, immigrant communities, people with culturally-mixed backgrounds, transnational and diasporic individuals, asylum seekers, refugees, residents with temporary stay permits, migrant workers and national minorities.

Libraries should aim, in acquiring materials, to reflect the multicultural composition of society and to foster an understanding of cultural diversity, racial harmony and equality.

Resources should be in heritage or Indigenous languages as well as in the national language/s and should include all appropriate media, and should assist newly arrived immigrants to adjust to their new country as well as preserve and promote oral, Indigenous and less-used languages.

Libraries should foster lifelong learning and social engagement through community education and training programmes, and public programme activities that celebrate and foster cultural diversity.

Libraries should provide a reference and information service in those languages most commonly used, and to those groups with greatest need.

2. The legal and financial framework

Governments and other decision-making bodies are encouraged to establish and adequately fund libraries and library systems to offer free library and information services to culturally diverse communities. It is a responsibility of all library authorities to meet the needs of their multicultural communities and to assure best practices are followed, such as:

- determining and promoting standards for library service to multicultural communities
- distributing information relating to existing collections for multicultural communities
- maintaining advisory services and consulting with multicultural communities
- conducting research into future needs and use
- fostering professional and international exchange
- supporting publishing in heritage languages and material by or about members of multicultural groups
- developing on-line databases and exchange of data
- collecting, evaluating and disseminating statistics on the application of guidelines, standards, best practices and policies

3. Meeting the needs of the users

Multicultural library services should be based upon knowledge of the culturally diverse communities they serve and their needs. This knowledge is obtained through community analysis, which involves identifying the characteristics of the community and the environment in which they live, and through needs assessment, which involves studying the information required and used by the community, and its availability.

Each individual library should clearly state its objectives, goals, strategies, priorities and policies relating to its services to multicultural communities, and adopt policies of clear commitment to social inclusion and equity of service provision.

Local, regional and national cooperative arrangements can substantially improve the quality of access to resources. Large library institutions and services may adopt a centralised role in the provision of multicultural resources and professional advice.

The multiscript and multilingual capabilities of computers enable multicultural communities access to reading, communication and information in their own languages. New technologies are continually being developed which ease communication between the librarian and user, and between community members. Internet technologies are useful in supporting and enhancing communication among communities.

Libraries, when acquiring integrated library systems and software, should ensure that they support Unicode in order to manage and provide multilingual access to all collections, and enable users to utilise the libraries' computer services in any language.

4. Collection development

A collection management policy for multilingual and multicultural resources should form an integral part of the library's overall Collection Management Policy. The content of the policy should be developed through consultation with multicultural communities.

Library materials should be provided for all peoples, in their preferred languages and relating to their own cultures, in all formats and from multiple sources, such as current periodicals and newspapers, sound recordings, DVDs and other digital formats, as well as a diverse range of non-book material including CD-ROM products, maps, images, games and language-learning kits.

The range of materials should cater for all age ranges and consist of a wide variety of genre. New acquisitions primarily should be recently published works, with a mixture of local (national, Indigenous) authors and translations of internationally popular material. Where books are published in more than one script, a representative collection in each script should be developed.

Libraries can provide a diverse range of multilingual electronic services to make their resources available to linguistically and culturally diverse communities. Libraries with networked databases or web sites should assure global access to these services through a multilingual interface.

Where there is a lack of print material, a low reading level in a multicultural community, or a significant level of illiteracy, then non-print materials, particularly sound and image recordings, should be emphasised, when these are available.

Cataloguing of all library materials should, where practically possible, be in the original language and script, and subject access in the national language/s may also be provided. The production and maintenance of union catalogues for all languages, in print or electronic form, is an important element in an equitable national or regional service.

As a general principle, book collections provided for each multicultural group should be provided at least at the same per capita level as for the general population. However, it should be recognised that for small groups it may be necessary to have a higher per capita provision than that generally applied, in order to provide an effective and more equitable service. A viable target to which smaller libraries may aim is the provision of 1.5 to 2.5 books per capita per multicultural group.

Materials and services for multicultural groups may need to be provided on a centralised or cooperative basis in order to achieve a more equitable service.

5. Human resources

The success of library services to a culturally diverse community is largely dependent on the staff delivering them. The fundamental qualities and skills required of public library staff can be defined as:

- the ability to communicate positively with people
- the ability to understand the needs of users
- the ability to co-operate with individuals and groups in the community
- knowledge and understanding of cultural diversity

Libraries should attempt to reflect the multicultural societies they serve by ensuring the staff truly reflect the different multicultural groups in the community. Library authorities should encourage the employment of people with relevant linguistic and cultural knowledge, skills and abilities, as well as institute education programmes designed to enrich the cultural knowledge of their staff.

Library schools should encourage people of multicultural background to undertake courses in librarianship and related areas, and ensure that all courses deal with multicultural issues.

6. The marketing, publicity and promotion of multicultural library services

The promotion, encouragement and support of literacy and of literacy programmes, including computer literacy, is an appropriate function for libraries, and should include both literacy in the national language/s and in other languages.

Social and cultural community activities organised by the library and in collaboration with community members should be directed to all multicultural groups.

Library service to persons unable to use the library personally should be provided, and extension activities of libraries should be conducted in the preferred languages of users. These include mobile and other services to the geographically disadvantaged, housebound, hospitals and correctional institutions.

Libraries should be designed to be user-friendly to all members of the community. A number of specific factors that can familiarise multicultural communities about their library services, as well as encourage their use, include:

- free public access and use of services
- signage in the languages of the main user groups or, where appropriate, international symbols
- multilingual resources
- marketing strategies to provide relevant services to multicultural communities
- collections which are easily accessible
- communication between the library and its users reflecting the linguistic diversity of the community (including the library website and promotional material)
- use of ethnic media in the community
- promotion of multilingual library services to politicians and decision makers

7. International Best Practice

Many countries have established practices in providing multicultural library services. The guidelines provide selected examples of best practice from Canada, Denmark, Estonia, the Netherlands, Norway, Spain, the United Kingdom, the United States of America, and Australia.

For the complete text of the guidelines, including examples of community needs assessment, international best practices, and other contextual information, please visit:

<http://www.ifla.org/publications/multicultural-communities-guidelines-for-library-services-3rd-edition>