

CELEBRATING WELCOMING WEEK

A GUIDE FOR LIBRARIES



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Presented by the Serving Refugees, Immigrants, and Displaced Persons Sub-Committee of the Office of Diversity, Literacy and Outreach Services American Library Association

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Introduction

[Welcoming Week](#) is an annual series of events during September when neighbors, newcomers, and long-time residents come together in a spirit of unity. Welcoming Week events are dynamic opportunities to encourage inclusion, dialogue and community-building through potlucks, film festivals, fairs, symposia, and other creative efforts. They provide a wonderful opportunity to gather members of all backgrounds 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. Libraries—whether school, public, or academic—all play an important and unique role in helping communities become more welcoming!

This event was started by [Welcoming America](#), 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. Check out Welcoming America on how your library and community can be involved with Welcoming Week activities in your community beyond those we have included below. To be featured, access resources and webinars, and to learn more, check out the Welcoming Week website.

Suggested Welcoming Week Activities

Below is a sample of Welcoming Week activities to try in your library. We encourage you to adapt these programs to your targeted audiences or the broader community.

- Host a Conversation Club or a [Human Library](#).
- Host a showcase event with local organizations.
- Host a public history event to collect community stories about refugees and immigrants to inspire connections and reciprocity.
- Host Storytime with immigrant stories.
- Host book clubs focused on immigrant stories.
- Create reading lists.
- Create a book and/or wall display of immigrant-centered materials.
- Invite and host author/creator visits from those who identify as refugees/asylees.
- Host film showings and discussion of films related to immigration, refugees, or asylum seekers.
- Launch digital photo “I stand with immigrants because...” campaign.

Adult Programming

- Host a film screening centered around the immigrant experience
- Host informal networking events or library tours in partnership with other organizations
- Host a public history event to collect community stories about refugees and immigrants to inspire connections and reciprocity.
- Organize a resource fair with representatives of governmental and nonprofit organizations
- Create reading lists or in-library displays
- Host book clubs focused on immigrant stories.
- Host a global foods/snacks/beverages celebration or a recipe share
- Organize a job fair for immigrants and refugees
- Invite and host author/creator visits from those who identify as refugees/asylees

Youth and Family Programming

- Display StoryWalks® featuring books about welcoming and immigration
- Offer storytimes featuring stories of welcoming, or a special storytime in a different language
- Create arts and crafts programs celebrating multicultural themes
- Offer a beginning language class featuring international languages
- Host a family music concert
- Celebrate a multicultural festival or holiday

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

The grant program options are available for adult literacy, family literacy, and youth literacy. Grants can be applied to organizations, schools, and libraries.

Innovative Reading Grant

This annual grant of \$2,500, only available to AASL (American Association of School Libraries) members, supports the planning and implementation of a unique and innovative program for K-9th grade learners which motivates and encourages reading, especially with struggling readers.

Carnegie-Whitney Grants

This grant of up to \$5,000 for the preparation of popular or scholarly reading lists, webliographies, indexes, and other guides to library resources that will be useful to users of all types of libraries in the United States.

Institute of Museum and Library Services (IMLS)

The Institute of Museum and Library Services offers a variety of grants to support libraries in enhancing their services, fostering innovation, and addressing community needs.

U.S. Department of Health & Human Services Ethnic Community Self-Help Program Programs (ECSH)

The ECSH Program supports ethnic community-based organizations in professional development for their staff by connecting them with well-established service providers

State Level

Different state libraries may provide funding and/or resources focused on specific areas. Check with your state library association to learn more about what grant, scholarship, and award opportunities may be available. Reach out to your state library to see what they can do to improve library services to immigrant and refugee populations.

State Libraries and Library Associations

- State Library Agencies: Often provide grants, resources, and training for libraries to support immigrant and refugee populations. For example, California State Library funds literacy and ESL programs.
- State Library Associations: Collaborate with libraries to share resources and promote best practices.

Departments of Education

- Adult Education Divisions: Offer funding for literacy programs, English Language Learner classes, and citizenship preparation courses.
- Title III (English Learner Programs): Support libraries in providing resources for English language acquisition.

Workforce Development Agencies

- Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA): State workforce agencies often fund programs focused on job readiness, vocational training, and adult education for immigrants and refugees.
- Apprenticeship Programs: State-run initiatives to integrate immigrants and refugees into skilled trades.

Health and Human Services Departments

- Refugee Resettlement Offices: Often housed within state health departments, these offices receive federal funding to provide services like case management, job placement, and community orientation.
- Community Health Programs: Support mental health, wellness, and healthcare access for immigrants and refugees.

Housing and Urban Development (HUD) Offices

- State and local HUD programs may offer grants for libraries addressing housing insecurity and providing related resources to displaced persons.

Immigration Assistance Programs

- State-Funded Legal Aid Organizations: Partner with libraries to host legal clinics or provide “Know Your Rights” workshops.
- Office of New Americans (where available): These state offices focus on integrating immigrants and refugees through education, job training, and legal support.

Cultural Affairs and Arts Agencies

- Provide funding for multicultural programming, storytelling projects, and integration initiatives that libraries can host.
- Public Safety and Emergency Management Agencies
- Funding for disaster response and preparedness programs for displaced populations, including migrants affected by climate-related displacement.

Departments of Agriculture

- SNAP-Ed Programs: Partner with libraries to educate immigrant families about food security and nutrition.
- Rural Development Grants: Support initiatives in rural areas for migrants and agricultural workers.

For funding opportunities, libraries should:

- Visit state websites to explore available grants.
- Contact state refugee coordinators for localized data and support.
- Engage with regional councils that focus on immigration and community development.

Local level

Your local area may also have a wide variety of collaboration partners and funding opportunities. Considering the size of your library and service area, you may be able to connect and partner with various individuals and groups in your community. Here are a few examples of where to find support for Welcoming Week-related programming:

- **Fundraising groups** within your libraries, such as a Friends group or the Development office (depending on your library organization size and staffing).
- **Organizations that support immigrant and refugee services**, such as resettlement agencies, immigrant service organizations, English language learning opportunities, and other organizations that provide services for housing, employment, social services, etc.
- **Community foundations and service clubs** that provide support to the community, such as your local Rotary Club, Lions Club, and volunteer organizations.
- Connecting with **local businesses** that do community services and engagement and seeing if there's possible partnership opportunities.
- Checking with your **local government and offices**, such as offices that provide services for the immigrant community.
- **Community and in-kind donations** can be helpful for programming support. Some nationwide companies like Starbucks allow for individual stores to make decisions regarding donating coffee, for example.

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 case studies represent different sizes, budgets, and 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.

Small and Rural Libraries

Sherwood Public Library, Sherwood, Oregon

Sherwood Public Library (SPL) provided multicultural storytime programs, led by guest readers. They sought out community members from different cultures and created culturally specific craft activities to accompany the program. These World Language Storytimes provided programs in Hindi, Spanish, Arabic, and Vietnamese. In addition to finding native language presenters to

provide storytimes, library staff ensured that each individual was also trained for storytime. Each storytime had an accompanying craft activity. Examples of what was used are below:

- World Language Take & Make craft kit
- Tiger craft kit
- Mini terracotta pinch pot craft kit
- Camel craft kit
- Dragonfly craft kit

SPL also hosted a cultural performance with guest performers from Ballet Folklórico Corazones Alegres, a local dance troupe from Washington County. In addition to programs, SPL was able to fund the creation of light pole banners that can be used each year along the city’s main street, along with promotional flyers and a social media campaign.

The library received a 2022 regional grant from the Oregon Cultural Trust and the Cultural Coalition of Washington County to offset costs. These grants, aimed at supporting arts, equity, and diverse experiences, are competitive and do not fund ongoing programs. After 2022, SPL sought to sustain Welcoming Week initiatives by reallocating internal funds. Over time, they enhanced celebrations with incremental improvements and, the following year, prioritized promoting new services for New Americans, reflecting their commitment to inclusivity and community engagement.

SPL believes that even small actions can create meaningful beginnings, with opportunities to grow over time. For example, they plan to continue hanging Welcoming Week signs around town each year, regardless of the scale of their programming. This ongoing effort emphasizes raising awareness of Welcoming Week throughout the community and maintaining its presence as an important initiative.

Public Library of Mount Vernon and Knox County, Mt Vernon and Knox County, Ohio

The Public Library of Mount Vernon and Knox County (PLMVKC) celebrated Welcoming Week with a variety of programs for the community. Activities have included a community picnic, book discussions for children and adults, and book giveaways. At the community picnic, PLMVKC invited a local chef, Chef Nav Adjodhya, who is a first-generation Guyanese and well known throughout the community. He spoke about his background in cooking, his experiences moving from New York City to Mount Vernon, Ohio, and the influence of multiple cultures on his life and craft.

PLMVKC hosted several book giveaway events for both children and adults. The selected title for children was “Kwaheri Sandy Footprints, Habari Hiking Trails” by local author, Debbie Nabubwaya Chambers. This title details the author’s biracial/Nigerian-American family’s experience moving from San Diego, CA to Mount Vernon, OH. The selected title for adults was “Solito: A Memoir” by Javier Zamora. For both book selections, the library hosted an accompanying book discussion program.

At the beginning of their Welcoming Week celebration, the PLMVKC community was experiencing rapid growth and recognized that not everyone felt “ready” to embrace newcomers as part of the community. This, combined with the effects of rural gentrification, contributed to a heightened sense of hostility toward those perceived as “outsiders.” As a major community hub, PLMVKC serves everyone who walks through its doors, making the library an ideal setting to host Welcoming Week activities and foster inclusivity for all.

As a smaller library system, PLMVKC took advantage of free resources, particularly Welcoming America toolkits. Any library can do this, and your first Welcoming Week does not have to be filled with programs. PLMVKC encourages everyone to start small in their first year. The difficulties they experienced included finding meeting times for busy community members and avoiding burnout among staff and coalition members. Looking back, library staff acknowledged they may have been too ambitious and are adjusting for future Welcoming Week celebrations by laying better groundwork to build from.

Large and Urban Libraries

Charlotte Mecklenburg Library and Queens University of Charlotte, North Carolina

Charlotte Mecklenburg Library partnered with Queens University, located less than a mile from the Myers Park Branch, to host a special Welcoming Week program titled *Sweets from Around the World*. This collaborative event aimed to celebrate cultural diversity and provide students with an opportunity to experience a variety of international sweets. Library staff worked alongside the Assistant Director for International Students at Queens to organize this engaging event.

International student ambassadors were invited to contribute by sharing childhood treats from their home countries. The nations represented included Ireland, Colombia, Ghana, South Africa, Serbia, Germany, the Netherlands, and Argentina. To source the sweets, library and university staff met at Super G Mart, a popular international grocery store in Charlotte, NC, where the cost of the treats was split between both organizations, with each spending approximately \$70. On the day of the event, library staff arrived early at the University to assist with setup and ensure everything ran smoothly.

Materials Needed:

- Tables
- Flags (printed or standing)
- Name cards for each country
- Serving dishes
- Sweets from around the world

Event Setup:

- Four tables were arranged in the student cafeteria.
- Name cards with country flags were placed on each table.
- Student ambassadors stood behind their respective tables, each displaying their country's flag and sharing the treats from their homeland.
- The lunch period was chosen to maximize participation, allowing students to casually interact between classes while learning about different cultures.

The student ambassadors played an essential role, offering first-hand insights into their cultures and the significance of the treats they shared. Despite busy schedules, over 100 students engaged in the event, enjoying meaningful conversations and exploring new cultural experiences. Many international students were thrilled to share stories about their home countries, while other students enjoyed a quick taste of something sweet as they hurried to their next class.

Information about the public library was provided, including how to sign up for a library card, programs, resources, and access to technology. The library also brought a small selection of books about the countries, and observed the student ambassadors using the books to point out their home town on the maps inside.

Reflecting on the event, the success was evident not only in the number of interactions but in the cultural connections made. It was an opportunity for students to connect with peers from different backgrounds, learn about global traditions, and, of course, learn more about the resources they have access to at their local public library.

Los Angeles Public Library, California

Welcoming Week extends year-round at the Los Angeles Public Library in California, where the library collaborates daily with the International Rescue Committee to support immigrants through initiatives such as the [New Americans initiative](#) and their [Be a Successful Street Vendor](#) program. New arrivals can also access [Know Your Rights](#) cards and workshops, ensuring they have valuable resources and support as they settle into their new communities.

Broward County Library, Florida

Located in South Florida, Broward County Library (BCL) embraces the principles of cultural and linguistic diversity outlined in the IFLA/UNESCO Multicultural Library Manifesto. BCL's staff reflects the community's rich diversity and is trained to effectively serve people from all backgrounds. Each branch of BCL offers bilingual English Cafés, computer classes, and citizenship classes, providing essential resources to support the community's diverse needs.

Mortenson Center for International Library Programs, The University of Illinois

The Mortenson Center, in collaboration with the New American Welcome Center and the University YMCA hosted a Human Library Event as part of the events featured during 2023 National Welcoming week. The event featured immigrants and international students living in Champaign-Urbana as human books. Each human “book” was available during the event to interact with “readers” and talk to them about their native country. Topics covered in the conversations included among others geographic location, cuisine, languages spoken and culture. The human volunteers were also free to share their story of how they came to the United States or anything else they wanted to share about themselves or their country. International food/cuisine was offered for sampling at the event. Eleven countries were featured at this inaugural event: Egypt, Indonesia, Iran, Greece, Kenya, Philippines, South Africa, Vietnam, Yemen, Zambia and the USA. In keeping with the mission of the Mortenson Center, the event aims to introduce the concept of “internationalization @ home to the University of Illinois community and to foster intercultural competency and global understanding as well as welcome newcomers to the community while embracing diversity and fostering a sense of belonging.

In September 2024, during National Welcoming Week, the Mortenson Center, in collaboration with the New American Welcome Center, The Urbana Free Library and Illinois International-Global Relations held a Human Library Event. The event featured immigrants and international students living in Champaign-Urbana as human books. Eleven countries were featured: Algeria, Argentina, Brazil, Congo, Guatemala, Jamaica, Kazakhstan, Russia, South Africa, South Korea and Yemen.

Queens Public Library, New York

Queens Public Library (QPL) provides monthly clinics at the library for legal immigration services. QPL is one of two ID NYC locations in Queens. The New Americans Program celebrates Queens residents’ cultures and helps newcomers understand life in the United States. They have “Know Your Rights Workshops” and “Free Resources for New Arrivals Workshops.”

Largo Public Library, Florida

Largo Public Library (LPL) established Welcoming Week programming in 2016, adopting the themes that Welcoming America develops for each annual welcoming week. In 2024, the theme was “We’re All In,” reflecting their city’s commitment to “embracing diversity and fostering a sense of belonging for everyone.” A key event is their month-long Household Goods Basket Drive organized in partnership with the Palm Harbor Public Library and the Barbara S. Ponce Public Library of Pinellas Park. The drive collects essential items for local refugees and newly arrived immigrants. Donations are accepted in designated boxes during regular library hours, and the public is encouraged to contribute items from an Amazon Wishlist. The goods collected are

distributed through local non-profits in coordination with the state of Florida's Department of Children and Families, refugee division, Tampa Bay region. LPL also accepts monetary donations through the Greater Largo Library Foundation to support the initiative. The library also hosted a film series during its 2024 Welcoming Week. For the past three years, there has been a city proclamation regarding the importance of Welcoming Week. During the reading of the 2024 proclamation, a new immigrant spoke at a City of Largo Commission meeting about her welcoming experience. Other year-round LPL programs relevant to Welcoming Week are twice weekly citizenship and naturalization classes taught by the non-profit Learning Empowered. These classes are part of the LPL Adult English Language Learning Program that also includes Weekday English classes facilitated by Pinellas County Public Schools; English conversion clubs; and one-to-one English lessons for students led by volunteer tutors.

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. We encourage all libraries to take a critical look at what they are doing and encourage cultural humility and learning through training for staff, expanding diversity within programming, and moving beyond performative work. Here are some examples of ways to celebrate year-round, grouped by intended outcomes.

Outcome 1: Build partnerships

- Collaborate with local organizations to provide services and/or resources.
- Meet refugee needs through programs and/or resources specifically designed for those audiences.
- Collaborate with student affinity and/or diversity groups to host a speaker.
- Provide online and/or print resource list sharing school resources for students who identify as immigrants or refugees.
- Collaborate with educators on lessons about immigrant and refugee history and rights.
- Establish "Know Your Rights" sessions and informational materials.
- Host citizenship test prep workshops and [partner with USCIS](#).

Outcome 2: Transform library programs

- Re-imagine programming to include diverse voices that foster and promote affinity and interconnection.
- Incorporate book titles, films, and media that celebrate immigrant stories into your library's regular programs.

- Conduct community outreach to see how your library can best meet the needs of your local immigrant or refugee community.

Outcome 3: Develop awareness

- Enhance library and community understanding of, and advocacy for, immigrants and refugees.
- Host Lunch-N-Learns.
- Review and share toolkits and relevant resources.
- Share experiences and resources via social media and library affiliate organizations.
- Post a position statement in solidarity with immigrants and refugees on your library’s website or social media.

Explore these resources as a helpful starting point for additional support:

[Becoming a Welcoming Space for Immigrants and Refugees](#)

The ALA’s “Becoming a Welcoming Space for Immigrants & Refugees” resource provides guidance for libraries to create inclusive environments. It emphasizes fostering trust, offering culturally relevant programs, and collaborating with local organizations. Topics include staff training, collection development, and outreach strategies tailored to immigrant and refugee communities. The page includes links to professional tools, best practices, and examples of successful programs. This resource helps libraries strengthen their role as community hubs for diverse populations.

[New Americans Library Project: The White Paper](#)

“In 2018, the ALA Public Programs Office convened an exploration of public library programs and services that support new American populations. The New Americans Library Project explored the landscape of literature and resources about library services for new Americans, studied how libraries can more effectively serve new Americans, and made recommendations about this topic for the library field.”

“This white paper provides a synthesis of the project to help library professionals understand opportunities for libraries’ work with new Americans. The paper includes two parts. First, an overview of research and findings summarizes the most salient themes uncovered in the landscape review and site visits. Second, we offer a list of actionable recommendations for libraries.”

REFORMA International Relations Committee’s Webinar on [“Library Services for Recently Arrived Latino Immigrants”](#) recording

“Our world is in turmoil. Latinos from different countries and heritage backgrounds are in need of library services supporting human rights. The information seeking process is driven by major life transitions such as violence against women and human rights violations. People from different countries are suffering from restrictions and censorship of their basic life rights that we take for granted here in the U.S.A. REFORMA is presenting an online event to discuss actionable ways in which librarians can support information needs for Latinos experiencing these situations.”

[Guidelines for Outreach to Immigrant Populations Toolkit](#), as prepared by the Ethnic and Multicultural Information Exchange Round Table (EMIERT) of ALA

“The aim of the guidelines is to provide a basis for the development of library services and programming that facilitate recent immigrants’ inclusion and participation into the broader society while also the preservation and promotion of their distinct cultural and linguistic heritages. Furthermore, the guidelines offer insight for ways in which libraries can celebrate and foster greater understanding of the cultural diversity that immigrants bring to their communities.”

Conclusion

Welcoming Week is a wonderful opportunity to foster connections and programs with immigrant communities, but libraries should extend these efforts beyond a single week to truly celebrate their communities’ diversity. We encourage libraries to critically examine their initiatives, expand programming, cultivate cultural humility, provide staff training, and move beyond performative actions to create lasting, meaningful impact.