



Reaching Out To Spanish-Speaking Volunteers

A Guide to More Inclusive Community Building



A Service of the Points of Light Foundation

Reaching Out To Spanish-Speaking Volunteers

A Guide to More Inclusive Community Building



Table of Contents:

Overview	1
Reaching The Community	3
Planning For One-On-One Contact	5
Additional Resources	7

This Guide will:

- Highlight how volunteers who only speak Spanish think about volunteering differently.
- Provide suggestions for how to reach this pool of potential volunteers
- Provide step-by-step instructions for how to prepare for engaging Spanish speaking volunteers in your programming.

Overview

According to the latest Census, there are 35 million people of Spanish-speaking origin or ancestry living in the United States. ¹How can you reach out most effectively to this fastest-growing segment of the US population and involve its members in your organization and the services it provides? This guide, developed by 1-800-Volunteer.org, the bilingual volunteer management service, will help you meet that challenge.

Why recruit Spanish-speaking volunteers?

Like any not-for-profit, your organization depends on volunteers to perform many valuable services. You want to make sure everyone in your community who needs those services has access to them — and one way to do that is to ensure that your volunteer base is as diverse as the community it serves. Having Spanish-speaking people in your volunteer corps will bring new perspectives to your organization, perhaps even will give you better information about what your community needs and how best to provide it. The more inclusive your organization, the better equipped it will be to help the greatest number of people.

Consider the cultural differences

It's important to respect your prospective Spanish-speaking volunteers as individuals and not make generalizations about them as a group. Our 35 million neighbors come from a variety of cultures. Customs and traditions will vary considerably among, for example, people of Cuban, Mexican and Colombian ancestry. Even the Spanish language differs from country to country, not only in terms of slang expressions and local sayings, but sometimes in basic vocabulary.

The name we use to refer to this population as a whole also is cause for sensitivity. Some people prefer the term “Spanish-speaking people,” which is a linguistic but not ethnic designation; others prefer (and themselves use) “Latino” precisely because it connotes ethnicity and culture. “Hispanic” is found in the names of quite a few groups and entities but often is not received favorably in reference to individuals. To avoid inadvertently causing offense, and to contribute to better bridge-building in your city or town among native speakers of Spanish and English, you should ask local leaders which terms are preferred by the majority in your community.

How do our ideas about volunteering differ?

Spanish-speaking immigrants' cultural orientation and attitudes toward volunteer work may differ sharply from your own. Volunteer organizations like those we have here in the United States are much less common, or at least are structured very differently, than those in the Spanish-speaking Caribbean, Mexico and Central and South America. That's because projects like providing hot meals or transportation to the homebound, which in the United States are handled by not-for-profit groups, are taken care of by more informal social structures in those countries. Extended families, neighbors, and church congregations all are well organized to take care of their own — and the concept of offering aid to strangers is much less prevalent, because the assumption is that those strangers have their own network of family, neighbors and church on which to rely. Those who have come to this country often have dependents back home to whom they send whatever extra money they manage to earn and so feel as though they're already helping others.

As a consequence, one challenge volunteer organizations face here is simply communicating the need for people to donate their time to helping others outside their own network. It's a question of a fundamental difference in the way our societies operate, and getting past that difference can represent a big challenge.

¹The real number, including undocumented residents as well as legal immigrants who simply were not accounted for in the official report, is likely a third higher.

An opportunity to promote good citizenship

Remember, most people from Spanish-speaking countries are less familiar than we are with the idea of joining an organization outside one's neighborhood or church to help strangers in other parts of the community. Rather than approach this as an obstacle, use it as an opportunity to help your prospective volunteers to assimilate into US society. Explain that doing volunteer work is one measure of good citizenship here — and a good way for them to become better acquainted with and more comfortable in US society.

Make clear, too, that they are not being asked to do work free of charge for which others would be paid. Like many immigrants, they may have had the experience of having someone take advantage of them, underpay them or cheat them of money or in some other manner imply that they deserve inferior treatment. Let them meet some of your native-born volunteers, and have those volunteers explain what personal satisfactions they have gained from the experience of donating time to your organization.

Did You Know?

On 1-800-Volunteer.org you can find a translated template for a letter in Spanish that you can use to initiate contact with houses of worship in your area. Follow that up with a phone call to arrange face-to-face meetings with the members of the clergy you contact. It's important to demonstrate clearly that you are reaching out to their community and not simply seeking more bodies to work as volunteers.

Reaching The Community

1. Develop partnerships with the most accessible organizations in your city or town: the Spanish-language houses of worship that are the center of religious and social life for members of this community, especially those who have not yet mastered English.

Making contact with and gaining the confidence of religious leaders is a critical first step in establishing trust among the community as a whole. Members of the clergy can give your organization a stamp of approval that will encourage a higher level of participation among your target audience than you'd be likely to achieve on your own. Equally important, they can identify teams of volunteers who will be more likely to participate jointly than they would be to do so individually, especially among those whose minimal English language skills might make them hesitate to get involved.

2. One resource that may help you in identifying those houses of worship you should contact is available online at:

www.hudsonfaithincommunities.org/index.cfm?fuseaction=church_search

This online database does not list every Spanish-speaking congregation in the country, but it does offer a list that's searchable by state and will get you off to a good start. Again, not all Spanish-speaking immigrants are Catholic. You'll find numerous Protestant congregations listed in the database. There's even a Mennonite congregation listed in New York. (The Mennonites have been particularly active in recent years in campaigns to aid undocumented Colombians in the United States or arrange for their amnesty and legal residency in Canada.) And although synagogues are not included in the database, some Spanish-speaking people are Jewish. To find them, check your local telephone directory for listings of Sephardic synagogues.

When you click on the name of a church in the database, you'll see a list of the services that church provides. This will give you a good idea of the areas in which your organization's work may mesh with that of the church and how you and the congregation might work in partnership on some projects. Doing outreach to the congregation as a whole will give you access to the largest pool of prospective volunteers.

3. Partner with organizations that serve this community. You'll find additional opportunities for outreach and collaboration through the direct service organizations in your area that already have established a client base — and trust — among Spanish-speaking people. These could include literacy and jobs training programs, for example. The staff and volunteers working on these programs have knowledge of the local community, its needs, leaders, and resources, and can help your organization to reach out successfully to Spanish speaking volunteers.

4. Consider establishing a program of “intercambios” — language exchanges — through which your new volunteers could improve their command of English as your organization's staff and volunteers gain some fluency in Spanish. These can offer a great basis for coalition- and team-building. Use members of this group to post your organization's opportunities and web content on 1-800-Volunteer.org.

5. Begin outreach to the restaurants and grocers in your city or town which serve the local immigrant population. Internet cafes and storefront operations that offer international telephone calling services also are good places to find many Spanish-speaking immigrants who rely on these businesses to help them stay in touch with family and friends at home. Ask the proprietors of these establishments for permission to leave Spanish-language materials in the area they have designated for flyers and other community news. And if your organization has any logo material, such as T-shirts, baseball caps, buttons or decals, offer those materials to the proprietor as a means of promoting your group and establishing your brand in this community.

Did You Know?

On 1-800-Volunteer.org you will find a translated template for a letter in Spanish that you can use to initiate contact with news organizations in your area. Don't worry about your proficiency in Spanish for purposes of conducting an interview. Most reporters from these news organizations are fully bilingual, so they can interview you in English and translate your comments to Spanish for their readers.

6. Contact community houses or other groups that could serve as another resource for identifying and reaching out to prospective volunteers. The members of the clergy or business owners with whom you make contact will be able to direct you to those organizations. Again, find out their areas of focus and approach them with a proposal for working on projects in partnership and, if possible, offer to organize jointly-sponsored intercambios.

7. Participate in the celebration of major holidays for Spanish-speaking countries, most of which quite possibly are unknown to you. To begin to familiarize yourself with those holidays, review the list at:

http://espanol.ucanr.org/Calendario/Major_Holidays_and_Celebrations_of_Spanish-Speaking_Countries.htm

Any one of these holidays will have more or less importance in your city or town depending on the nationalities of your local Spanish-speaking residents. If there's a celebration in the works, find out how your organization can participate. Ideally, you'd be able to have a booth or table at an outdoor fair — and if some representatives of your group could show up early or stay late to assist with setting things up or doing after-event clean-up, so much the better. You want to become familiar faces in the community. If there's no event planned, think about sponsoring one yourself. Even something small-scale and simple can help you to establish your ties to this community.

8. Don't forget the media. A growing number of periodicals and broadcasters serves the Spanish-speaking market, and just as in English, a Spanish-language story about your organization can spark interest among prospective volunteers. The website www.zonalatina.com offers extensive media listings by country, with links to the home pages of all media included:

- Daily/Weekly newspapers www.zonalatina.com/ZIpapers.htm
- Magazines www.zonalatina.com/ZLmagaz.htm
- Radio stations www.zonalatina.com/Radio.htm
- Television www.zonalatina.com/BroadTV.htm

Note that the listings are alphabetical by name of the publication rather than by city.

Planning for One-On-One Contact

Your staff should be representative of the communities you serve, and ideally this means having employees who are Latino and/or English-Spanish bilingual to facilitate communication among staff and volunteers. Having a diverse staff will have an impact on your success rate not only in recruiting Spanish-speaking volunteers, but in providing services to Spanish-speaking constituents. Both will find it easier to relate to and have confidence in an organization with an inclusive staff. It's equally important to demonstrate that your organization has a commitment to providing employment opportunities to Spanish speakers and is not focused on this community exclusively as a source of volunteer labor.

However, your organization may have a very small staff or may for some other reason not yet have expanded to include Spanish speakers. In that case, you will need to find ways to communicate individually with those prospective volunteers who respond to your outreach.

1. Add Spanish to Your Phone System

Facilitate first contact by incorporating some simple Spanish message into your voicemail system and website. Within your voicemail, this can be something as simple as an addition to your standard outgoing greeting that says, “Para dejar un mensaje en español, marque el uno” (“To leave a message in Spanish, press one”). Of course, you'll need someone within your organization — or an outside volunteer who has offered support—who can listen to, understand, and respond to those messages. If no one in your organization can do that, ask one of your local community contacts — a clergyman, community leader, or business owner—to serve as your organization's point person for Spanish-language telephone inquiries.

When you click on the name of a church in the database, you'll see a list of the services that church provides. This will give you a good idea of the areas in which your organization's work may mesh with that of the church and how you and the congregation might work in partnership on some projects. Doing outreach to the congregation as a whole will give you access to the largest pool of prospective volunteers.

2. Add Spanish to Your Website

For a larger Spanish-language presence on the Internet, make use of the resources available through 1-800-Volunteer.org, which has established Spanish-language pages to provide information about local volunteer opportunities. Whether you are an organization or a Volunteer Center using the service, posting content in Spanish is easy. Simply click the “Español” tab and enter Spanish content everywhere you would enter English content. Here are a few areas where you might consider posting Spanish content:

- In the introductory language of your website
- In your mission description (if you are an organization using the system)
- In your “About Us” or “Programs” section (if you are a Volunteer Center)
- In the “Contact Us” instructions
- When posting opportunities, events or activities.

However, it is a good idea to hire (or engage as a volunteer) someone who can translate volunteer instructions and any additional offline forms into Spanish.

Volunteer Instructions Might Cause Confusion

“Phrasal verbs” are pairings of words that function in English as verbs but make no sense if analyzed literally. You “pick up” the phone to “check out” Señor García’s references, and after you “write down” some notes and “size up” his abilities, you “pull out” your calendar to schedule his orientation. Señor García, however, may be thoroughly confused when you call to ask if he’d rather “sign up” for the Tuesday or Thursday session. We use these terms so constantly and so unconsciously that it will be almost impossible to avoid them — but be prepared for a confused look in response, and give some thought to an alternate means of explaining your meaning.

3. Prepare for Face-to-Face Conversations

Some things to remember once you’re speaking with your prospective volunteers:

- a) **Personal communication styles tend to be more formal** in Spanish than they are in English, particularly if you are speaking with someone who is older than you. It’s best to use Señor or Señora (Last Name) rather than immediately assuming the informality of using his or her first name, which could be seen as a sign of disrespect.
- b) **If your prospective volunteer has only limited fluency in English**, invite a more bilingual friend or relative to attend your initial meeting. Do not, however, speak exclusively to that bilingual companion. Address the pair jointly, and make sure that you enunciate clearly and don’t speak too quickly. (It’s not helpful, however, to speak at an exaggerated slow pace.)
- c) **Avoid slang expressions** with which your applicants may be unfamiliar, and give some thought to an alternate means of explaining your meaning.
- d) **Simplify and streamline the written application process** as much as possible. The process of applying for a visa to live in or even visit this country is daunting and gives immigrants a negative first impression. You don’t want your application procedure to appear to create the impression that you’re erecting new barriers they need to scale. Similarly, couch your language in positive terms so you don’t inadvertently give them the impression that there’s a good chance they’ll be rejected by your organization. The phrase “once your application is approved” is more welcoming than “if your application is approved” for example.
- e) **Be aware that recent immigrants tend to struggle economically** (This is true of any ethnic group or nationality.) Time, therefore, is a critical issue for your prospective volunteers, many of whom may be working multiple jobs just to make ends meet — and may think of themselves as being in a position in which they ought to be receiving, rather than offering, assistance.
- f) **Ask them about their circumstances** and listen carefully to their responses so that you don’t ask more of them than they are able to give. Let them know that you’re willing to work with them to accommodate their scheduling needs in exchange for their making a commitment to doing the work.
- g) **Thank them for their interest** in participating in your group’s activities. Show appreciation for the personal sacrifices they are willing to make to support the work you do, and show them whatever flexibility you can in return for their commitment to your organization.

One area in which the culture does not vary from country to country is the manner in which members of a community look after one another. By engaging Spanish-speaking individuals in your volunteer program, you will not only be positioned to better respond to the needs of your local diverse community, but you will also add richness to the skills of your volunteer base, and to the public image of your organization or Volunteer Center.

Additional Resources

For more information about how to use 1-800-Volunteer.org in your community to recruit Spanish-speaking volunteers, visit www.1-800-Volunteer.org or contact the Points of Light Foundation & Volunteer Center National Network at 202-729-3231.



About 1-800-Volunteer.org

1-800-Volunteer.org is an online, community-based volunteer management tool designed by and built especially for Volunteer Centers by the Points of Light Foundation & Volunteer Center National Network. English and Spanish speaking volunteers can use the system to connect to volunteer opportunities in their community. Volunteer Managers can use 1-800-Volunteer to post, manage, and track volunteer projects – including preparing and mobilizing volunteers during emergency or disaster situations. Volunteer Centers of the Volunteer Center National Network manage local 1-800-Volunteer.org portals for their respective communities and work with local organizations to incorporate their information into the system.