Lost in Translation No More: Proactively Breaking Down Language Barriers

Jake Garcia, Policy Director @ Latino Community Fund
Giovanni Severino, Policy Organizer @ Latino Community Fund

What is Latino Community Fund?

- LCF is a non profit organization that cultivates new leaders, supports cultural and community based organizations, with the goal of improving the quality of life for all Washingtonians
- Economic Empowerment, Healthy Latino Families, Civic Engagement & Advocacy and more!

Why Broader Language Access?

- Our jobs is to ensure that every individual, regardless of the language they speak, has access to the services, information, and opportunities our state or employer provides.
- When we make information and services accessible in multiple languages, we not only remove barriers, but we also foster trust and create a more inclusive environment.
- The positive impact of language accessibility on individuals and communities is profound. Families are better equipped to understand and navigate vital systems, children have greater educational support, and small businesses are empowered to thrive.

Shared Understanding: A Diverse Language Landscape

- Washington state is a linguistically diverse, with over 100 languages spoken.
- Approximately 10% of Washington state's population speaks a language other than English at home.
- This translates to around 700,000 people.
- Spanish is the most common non-English language spoken, followed by languages like Russian, Chinese, and Vietnamese.

Shared Understanding: So Far, So Good but More to Do

- WA has taken crucial steps toward nourishing a truly multicultural community, but we can do more.
- Language Access Plans are helpful guiding principles, but language justice must live in every facet of our work – just like the languages we speak are in every corner of our lives.
- Establish baseline messages to reflect targeted universalism.

LCF's Alianza Youth Leadership Program

Our Aliana Youth Leadership Program provides youth from across the state to explore creative ways to address issues in their communities. An issue that some Alianza Youth have identified are language barriers among staff and parents at schools.

- Many times, students are tasked to translate conversations between the parents and teachers. This may lead to the conversation getting lost in translation.
- Teachers & state employees do care for the people they serve. Non-english speakers are part of our community too. They contribute to our society now, and in the future.
- Clarity is not a given; but when translated, it opens the door.

Actionable Steps: Plan for Partnerships

- Partnerships are the cornerstone of any robust work plan.
- Plan to compensate partners who:
  - Assist with the messaging of the project.
  - Translate the initial materials (this could be a third party translation vendor).
  - Conduct a community review of the translated materials.
  - Help disseminate the translated material(s) after completion.

Actionable Steps: Plan for Partnerships Cont'd

But where can we find these partners?
- Refer to trusted community-partners or build that partnership
  - Building relationship can be as simple as an email to a colleague or a shot in the dark/cold contact.
- Be proactive in consideration of local, existing relationships to leverage.

In Practice: The Other Side of Administrative Advocacy

- What does it look like when state partners listen to us?
- Advocates are prepared to support.
  - Advocates go where they're invited AND needed.
- What happens when we can't / don't step up?
  - State agencies and advocates alike share the burden of failing community.
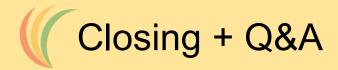
In Practice:
DSHS & Advocates for Access

In Practice: Sen. C. Wilson and Stakeholdering

Actionable Steps: Loop Us In

- You are not alone. There are many organizations/ community groups that support your work. Refer clients to those groups so they can receive assistance in their primary language.
- Invite us and community members to make suggestions.
- Join our activities on your free time.

Closing + Q&A

Together, we can make our communities stronger, more resilient, and more connected by embracing and supporting language accessibility in all its forms.