

Strategies for Inclusive, Bilingual Community Events

In Willimantic, people speak many different languages. The most common are Spanish and English. In many spaces, we still only speak English. When planning community events, it's important to think about your group and offer Spanish translation or translation to other languages if needed. This includes translating materials like flyers and also having a translator or multiple translators at the event. You should also include translation at meetings or spaces where decisions might be made. This will help all people feel welcome and create an inclusive space. There is no right way to set up translation at your event. You can use the guide below to help think about what works best for your goals and for your group.

When deciding what is the best format for a bilingual community event, here are some initial questions to consider:

- What is the breakdown of your audience: what language(s) are spoken? By how many people?
 - *Reflect on how inclusion/exclusion of the different groups would impact your event goals and the ability of most to participate.*
- Does language correlate with class, socio-economic status, or social tensions within the group? How might your translation format reinforce or alleviate those differences or tensions?
 - *Yes, many of the people who speak Spanish also are low-income and monolingual. They don't see themselves as leaders in the group, because they have not traditionally been given a voice. Many of these people don't know how to write and are not literate. Translation will help them feel welcome and bridge gaps between the group participants.*
- What is your primary goal for this event, for the hosts and the participants? Is it primarily to convey information or accomplish a task, or is your focus to create a bilingual environment and to build relationships? Some formats are more efficient at conveying information; other formats are more effective at creating connections.

DIFFERENT FORMATS

I. Simultaneous (with headphones or whispered)

Simultaneous Translation is when an interpreter translates at the same time that a person is speaking in another language.

- in a large group, if you have the technology, sometimes one group can wear headphones, or if only a small group needs the translation within that larger group, they could sit close to an interpreter. This is called **WHISPER** translation.

- or if the conversation varies between languages, then you can have an interpreter for both languages, and the conversation can alternate depending on the language of the speaker.

Pros?

- Ideal for one on one, or small groups
- Cuts downtime because there are barely any pauses
- It's more personal
- Creates a better flow to the meeting
- You can translate to multiple languages at the same time.

Cons?

- You can't apply this method to larger groups, bigger than 4-5 people who need translation.
- It can be confusing when you're talking over someone.
- Not every translator is capable of doing this method. It's really difficult.
- It's the hardest method of translating and some pieces will be left out.

Which context is this best for?

when the group who needs translation is less than 5 people, when you're on a tight schedule

Important things to do/avoid with this format?

- Coordinate with lead facilitator so there's an understanding that translation will happen. Make them aware that they may need to pause.
- Tell the group that translation is happening, so that they can speak slowly and clearly.
- Make sure the people who are receiving translation know that the translator will translate anything they want to contribute.
- Don't assume someone needs translation based on how they look.
- Tell the group in all native languages that translation is available.

How to make it more inclusive? Perhaps have multiple interpreters, for each language group, and alternate the primary language of the event or workshop.

- in a small group, again, there could be one or two interpreters, depending on whether the conversation alternates between different languages, depending on the speaker.

II. CONSECUTIVE TRANSLATION: everyone listens to everything, the person talking pauses for translation to happen.

Pros?

- People don't feel singled out.
- You can translate for everyone to hear (including those who speak the dominant language).
- Acknowledges that all languages and voices are important to the group.

- Best practice for large groups of people who speak something other than the dominant language.

Cons?

- People with hearing aids or difficulty hearing will have a problem.
- It can be disruptive for people who speak the dominant language and at times it can affect the flow of the meeting
- Some people might not feel like they can speak up in a large group. They might not feel like the translator is there for them.
- It takes a lot of time. People get anxious.
- You can only do this with one language at a time.

Which context is this best for? large groups, when you want to create a bilingual environment and build relationships, when the group is just starting work together to set a tone of inclusion

Important things to do/avoid with this format?

- Coordinate with lead facilitator prior to the meeting to make sure they coordinate their agenda to allow for translation.
- Tell the group that translation is happening, so that they can speak slowly and clearly.
- Make sure the people who are receiving translation know that the translator will translate anything they want to contribute back to the dominant language.
- Don't assume someone needs translation based on how they look.
- Gauge the room's interest to see if people are getting anxious. If so, maybe you should change the format for part of the meeting.
- Tell the group why translation and inclusion is important. Maybe highlight the fact that they are lucky to be in a bilingual environment. We don't often get to build relationships with people who speak other languages.

How to make it more inclusive? Alternate lead facilitator and language being translated to; flip the script

III. SEPARATE GROUPS: Start off in a big group, perhaps, and then break into smaller groups by language.

Pros?

- Each language group feels more comfortable.
- It's a more productive space if you don't have to worry about translation.
- You can always come back to the bigger group to share.

Cons?

- The groups don't get to know each other as well.
- You make a division between the people who already feel marginalized and the rest of the group.
- People don't have to think about inclusion.

Which context is this best for? when a group needs to get something done quickly and accomplish a task, when people don't feel comfortable at first

Important things to do/avoid with this format?

- Have a clear sense of what you want the groups to accomplish
- Tell the groups that they will come back to the larger group later.
- You shouldn't guide people to a group. Let them decide.
- Make sure that at one point you come back to the mixed group.

How to make it more inclusive? Offer activities or icebreakers that engage the whole group.

BIG QUESTION: How much choice do you give people about whether they're in a mixed or same-language group?

- It depends on the group you are working with and the desired outcome of your event. If you want to give people a choice during the first meeting, it might help them feel comfortable. If your goal is to help people talk to people they don't already feel comfortable with, it might be best to mix it up. Just remember there is really no nice/right way of doing this. But, you should definitely have a clear outcome of what you are trying to accomplish with your people.

What are the pros and cons of giving the choice vs mixing things up.

PROS (Giving a Choice)

- People are more comfortable
- Easier to break the ice
- More interaction of all participants
- Increase participation of all
- Less interruptions

Cons (giving a choice)

- People don't have to interact with others from different backgrounds
- You might get less diverse perspectives in a group
- People don't get to hear other languages

Pros (Mixing things up)

- More diverse group
- Many different perspectives can contribute to a meaningful discussion
- get people to interact that don't normally talk to each other

Cons (Mixing things up)

- People might feel uncomfortable, less relaxed
- there might be a disproportionate group of people, which may lead to some groups having dominance over the other.

Strategies for creating mixed groups: colored stickers at the entrance, numbers, etc...

Colored stickers: Have a registration table, and hand out different colored stickers to every person that comes. If a group comes all together, they will automatically be forced to split up. This way you try to get diversity and put people with people they don't know already. This method also works with numbers, depending on how many groups you want.