

Four Tips for Successful Multilingual Community Engagement



Nearly 22 percent of U.S. residents speak a language other than English at home. In the country's five largest cities, nearly half speak another language at home (Center for Immigration Studies.) Traditional community outreach leaves community members, who often benefit the most from development, underrepresented, simply because they are not comfortable communicating in English.

At coUrbanize, we know that successful, inclusive engagement means that all voices are heard. This requires meeting people where they're at - which includes communicating with them in their native language. When working in diverse communities, multilingual outreach is essential to reach often marginalized populations, gather more representative feedback and ultimately build a better project. Thoughtful, multilingual outreach is a big part of this equation.

Four Tips for Multilingual Community Outreach

✓ 1. Know the community.

Know the demographics of the neighborhood in which you want to build. A little research will let you know what languages you should include in your outreach strategy. In addition to publicly available data, community groups can offer additional insight into a given community's language needs.

Tip – The best way to get multilingual outreach right? Think about who is on your team. Does anyone speak these languages? If not, consider how you can get this representation - perhaps by setting up an advisory group, hiring boots-on-the-ground resources from within the community or making multilingual hires a priority (especially if your projects are often within the same market).

✓ 2. Understand that multilingual means multicultural too.

In any community engagement strategy, messaging is always important. If you're working in a multilingual community, you're likely working in a multicultural one as well. Be thoughtful with your messaging. Direct translations aren't always the best method. How can you share your message in a way that will resonate with subsets of your audience?

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3. Create and share multilingual materials.

When distributing mailers, SMS signs, or surveys, make sure to include translated versions in the languages needed. With coUrbanize's Language Equity Plan, the coUrbanize platform and all printed materials used to promote coUrbanize (SMS text messaging signs, door hangers, mailers) will be translated into the threshold languages for that project as part of the standard package – aka with no additional cost.

A language meets the Language Threshold for translation when at least 5% of the population in the project's zip code or Census tract speaks that language at home, as determined by most recently available US Census American Community Survey estimates.

Tip – In urban areas, you may find there are 3+ key languages spoken in the community. On coUrbanize, we often see project sites translated in 5-7 languages. That effort goes a long way in building trust with the community.



4. Be prepared to respond and engage.

Now that you've executed a multilingual outreach strategy, expect to receive comments and responses in multiple languages. Have a plan to translate those comments and then respond to and engage with those community members. Don't let them go unanswered.

To learn more about coUrbanize and how we can help your team with inclusive, multilingual outreach using our Language Equity Plan, email us at sales@courbanize.com or [request a demo here](#).