



Tip-Sheet: Friendly Meetings for English Language Learners

December 2018

This Tip-Sheet is the first Supplement to the basic Tip-Sheet: [Planning Friendly Meetings, Going Beyond the ADA to Make Your Meeting Place User-Friendly](#).

Note on using this Tip-Sheet: It is a short paper full of helpful tips. It is not meant to be a How-To Guide.

Terminology: Limited English Proficiency is the standard term in formal written material. Many persons learning to speak English and staff working with them prefer not to use this term. An alternative is English language learners. We use this term in the Tip-Sheet, but you may find another similar term that is more effective in your community.

Helpful Tip: Do not discount how much you probably already know.

The main ideas for planning general community meetings also apply to meetings for a target audience. The information in this tip-sheet can be your foundation as you plan on how to include persons who are learning to speak English.

Suggested Steps for Getting Started

Seek Advice from Community

Include at least a few persons from your target audience as you develop your ideas for your meetings – persons you and your staff may already know or persons recommended by community organizations that work with the target audience.

If you have already had a previous meeting or meetings, seek out persons – community persons and staff who attended to get their suggestions and recommendations.

Work with organizations that assist persons who are English language learners.

These organizations can be valuable partners and

valuable resources. If you already have an ongoing relationship with community services and groups that work with the target population, strengthen those relationships and request their guidance.

If you do not already have a relationship, seeking out a group for advice on planning your meeting can be the first step towards creating a cooperative relationship. They can become your allies and supporters – speaking directly about your program, distributing your material, and referring persons to you.

These organizations can be resources for:

- Useful information on culturally appropriate outreach methods and meeting formats, and especially insights and tips gained from their own experience – information that may not be written down.
- Introductions to additional individuals or groups likely to be interested in the topic of your meeting.
- Language interpreters and translators.
- Locations for your meeting that are easily accessible to the target population and where they will feel comfortable.
- Suggestions for meeting times
- Information about the transportation preferences and needs of your target audience.

Two examples of community organizations providing assistance:

- A community transportation provider in rural California had all its schedules translated into Spanish because a Department of Social and Health Services offered – at no cost – to translate them as part of a class she would be teaching.
- One community transportation program in Massachusetts wanted to be available to Chinese-speaking residents, but did not have any scheduling or dispatch staff that spoke Chinese. They found a work-around where a Chinese-speaking town employee from a different department was willing to be the point person for Chinese-language transportation calls.

Helpful Tip: Ask one or several of these organizations to introduce you and/or another staff member to make a short presentation about your program at one of their meetings.

Being able to talk about your program is a valuable way to introduce your agency and your program, and for you or other staff to get experience on how to present effectively to your target population – English language learners

Planning the Meeting

Review the [Tip-Sheet on Planning Friendly Meetings](#) to note the accessibility features necessary for a meeting and meeting place to be welcoming to older adults and persons with disabilities. Many of these features will apply also to members of your target audience.

TIP: Remember Caregivers

Be sure to include in your invitations and all outreach material that all caregivers, including friends and family as well as paid ones, are welcome.

Including caregivers is important and often essential part of a successful meeting.

- Many people, especially older adults and people with disabilities, need guidance and assistance with their physical movements.
- Persons with limited language and reading skills often depend on younger family members to translate for them. Their presence often enables the persons they accompany to understand and participate in your meeting.
- Allow Extra Time: It will be necessary to plan for the extra time that is likely to be needed to communicate in two languages - speeches, Q-and-A sessions, and group exercises.
- Signage and written materials for the languages represented: There may already be some dual language signs at your site, but it can be surprisingly hard to think of every place (TIP – remember rest rooms), where such signs are needed for your meeting.

» Directions to locations and location

changes (outside and within the building);

» If refreshments are served – temperature alerts on sink faucets, food content descriptions (people often avoid certain foods because of allergies, preferences, or religious restrictions).

Meeting Format

Today many organizations routinely use communication techniques that engage the audience, for example,

- Roundtables for audience seating that gives people a chance to talk with each other, and later to do group exercises together.
- Speakers who do not stand in back of a podium, but who establish eye contact with the audience, who ask questions and then use responses to shape their remarks.

These communication techniques, particularly the roundtables, can be successfully adjusted to include English language learners with the assistance of translators. (Caregivers can often fill this role).

Other Necessary Modifications

Whether you are planning a meeting for English language learners or a general meeting with only a few persons learning English, these are modifications that you need to consider in your planning.

For Each Table

For group exercises, consider providing a translator or interpreter at each table to assist English language learners with the exercises. This is a situation in which caregivers can provide valuable assistance. If more than one language group will be attending, consider whether to group people who speak the same language at the same tables.

Outreach Material

If at all possible, have your materials in the language or languages of your target population.

Ask related community organizations to distribute

and post flyers and posters, and to include your outreach information in their newsletters, listserv emails, and other public engagement materials.

Helpful Tip: Include staff contact information in outreach material.

Directly contacting staff is the simplest way for a reader to ask for additional information or to ask questions.

All your communications should include contact information to a staff member to direct questions or to request more information on any topic. See the SWMPC Participation Plan in the resources list for complete citation.)

Acknowledgements

This Tip-Sheet originated in a monthly conference call involving Transit Planning 4 All demonstration project grantees, when a project director inquired whether we had information on working with English language learner. We did not, but offered to create a Tip-Sheet.

Staff worked with members of a technical expert panel and the advisory group for the ACL Inclusive Transportation Planning Project to prepare this Tip-Sheet.

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Resources for This Tip Sheet

[Resources for Transportation 4 All website](#)

[Tip-Sheet: Planning Friendly Meetings, Going Beyond the ADA to Make Your Meeting Place User-Friendly](#) – March 2015

[How to Engage Low-Literacy and Limited-English Proficiency Populations in Transportation Decision-making](#), (FHWA) – February 2006

[Transportation for Persons with Limited English Proficiency](#), (CTAA) – April 2007

[Public Participation Southwest Michigan Planning Commission](#) (2017)

The Transit Planning for All program is a national technical assistance project created to help communities in adopting inclusive planning practices. The project is funded through a cooperative agreement between the Administration for Community Living and the Community Transportation Association of America, and is operated through a consortium of four organizations – the Community Transportation Association of America, the Institute for Community Inclusion at the University of Massachusetts, Boston, the National Association of Area Agencies on Aging, and DJB Evaluation Consulting.

