

Improving Linguistic Equity in Extension Programming: Dialect-Aware Strategies from New Jersey

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Background

Languages Spoken Other than English in New Jersey

Spanish	36.2%
Filipino, Tagalog	3.5%
Chinese	3.4%
Hindi	3.3%
Korean	3.3%
Gujarathi	3.2%
Portuguese	2.7%
Arabic	2.5%
Polish	2.1%
Russian	1.9%

In New Jersey, 22,2% of residents are immigrants, and Spanish is the second most spoken language, and, like any language, it has many variations influenced by nationality, identity, language contact, and others.

Access to Extension resources in Spanish is already limited, and the issue compounds when considering that most resources are not dialect aware

Dialects matter

Vocabulary, tone, and meaning differ between dialects, making it easy to miscommunicate and misunderstand messages. This represents issues particularly in health and safety-related services.



Awareness of differences in dialogs can prevent unintentional changes in meaning, mistrust from community members, and reduction of risks.

Interpreting vs Translating



Translating refers to converting written material from one language to another. Interpreting often refers to the live conversion of spoken or signed language.

It is advised not to rely on untrained or paraprofessional individuals, even if they

are bilingual, as this can lead to unintentional oversimplification, summarizing, or incomplete mediation relay. It is best to obtain support from individuals who are formally trained and hold recognized credentials in interpreting or translation.

Checklist

Plan & Prepare

- Identify dialect groups
- Co-create a mini glossary
- Start with widely used forms of Spanish
- Adapt to regional terminology as needed
- Add visuals, numeric examples, and teach-back prompts
- Ensure Culturally and Linguistically Appropriate Services (CLAS) alignment

Engage & Deliver

- Start with a dialect welcome
- Confirm key safety/health terms both verbally and in writing
- Offer audio summaries (voice notes)
- Avoid jokes about accents/words

Evaluate & Improve

- Track questions, misunderstandings, and preferred terms
- Invite feedback
- Update glossaries/materials
- Credit community contributors.

Takeaways

There is no expectation to master or learn every dialect and regionalism, the expectation is to treat them all with respect and clarity and allowing them to exist in the same space.

Normalizing the diversity of dialects within Spanish can reduce risks, support improved learning, encourage community members to ask for help, foster more inclusive youth spaces and increase their trust in Extension professionals.

