

IFLA Section on Library Services to Multicultural Populations Adopts Ten Reasons to Offer Multicultural Library Services

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As library and information professionals we are often asked what are "multicultural library services" (MLS) and why should such services be provided. The IFLA Section on Library Services to Multicultural Populations has been grappling with these questions in our recent review of the Section's definition of multiculturalism. As a member of the Section and an extension of the discussion and understanding of multiculturalism in library and information practice, I developed a draft of ten reasons to offer multicultural library services ("Raison d'être for Multicultural Library Services," *IFLA Library Services to Multicultural Populations Section Newsletter*, pp. 6-7, November 2004. <http://www.ifla.org/V11/s32/news/s32-newsletter-Nov04.pdf>) for the Section to consider. At its 1st March 2005 meeting, held in Rome, the Section considered these 10 reasons and adopted them with minor changes. This list referred to as the *raison d'être* for multicultural library services is being translated and will soon be made available in multiple languages.

While the list provides reasons for offering multicultural library services, these can best be appreciated by understanding what are MLS. First, MLS include both the provision of multicultural information to all types of library users and the provision of library services specifically targeted to traditionally underserved ethnocultural groups. Often we consider MLS as mainly benefiting "minority" communities as it is these communities whose ethnocultural background is different from that of mainstream society and whose needs are often not or minimally addressed. MLS ensure equity in access to library and information services. However, multiculturalism is a condition that is related to the diverse make-up of a whole community so as such, the whole community should benefit from "multicultural library services." Thus, the other half of delivering MLS is the provision of multicultural information that will benefit the totality of a user community. Members of a community can learn about each other's respective cultures, languages, contributions to society, values, etc. The end result being increased understanding and communication. Second, MLS should be the *de facto* library services rather than add-on or separate services.

The following rationale makes explicit the value of MLS for a library's community as a whole, and the need and appropriateness for MLS in all library settings, not only public libraries, anywhere in the world.

Ten Reasons to Offer Multicultural Library Services

- 1) A library's mission is to serve its community, which in many cases is multicultural and multilingual, or becoming increasingly culturally diverse.
- 2) Multicultural and multilingual library services ensure equality of service and access to information.
- 3) In an era of globalization with more ease in transborder communication and travel, individuals need to learn about other cultures, languages, and peoples, which foster appreciation for different experiences and broaden one's outlook on life.
- 4) Information in languages and through channels accessible to diverse user communities enables their democratic participation in civil society.

- 5) Information on one's own heritage as well as others reinforces one's own culture and promotes understanding of other experiences and perspectives, respectively, and contributes in the development of a more harmonious society.
- 6) Information in languages and through channels appropriate to diverse user communities promotes multiple literacies, which facilitate the acquisition of new knowledge and skills to ensure equality of opportunity in all realms of civil society.
- 7) The world's knowledge, creative forms of expression, and cultural practices are documented in diverse formats and languages, thus, the offering of a multicultural collection should be made available for all to access.
- 8) Learning of different forms of creative expression, work and problem solving lead to fresh insights and opinions which can result in novel ways to innovate, act and resolve situations.
- 9) Information about and for a library's multicultural community demonstrates that community members and their cultures are valued.
- 10) Libraries are spaces for intellectual and recreational engagement and libraries offering multicultural and multilingual services, and collections become a community space to bring people together.

Equity of library services is advocated by the provision of multicultural library services. It is hoped that with equity of access to information through libraries, individuals and communities will have equity of access to opportunities locally, nationally and/or globally, and will be able acquire the information that will empower them to break through institutional barriers that deny them access and representation.