Creating Community-Based Health Education Materials for Indigenous Farmworkers

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The Importance of Creating Accessible and Culturally Sensitive Resources for Indigenous Farmworkers

The COVID-19 pandemic demonstrated the importance of creating and sharing accessible health education materials to encourage individuals to make informed decisions regarding their health and well-being. While English and Spanish are the most commonly spoken languages in the United States, in recent years, there have been diasporic waves of Indigenous peoples from southern Mexico and Central America migrating to the U.S., many of whom do not speak nor understand Spanish or English¹. Since the 1980s, Mexican immigrants have comprised the largest percentage of the immigrant population in the United States. In the past decade, immigrant populations from Guatemala and El Salvador have increased, making them two of the top ten sending countries². In Guatemala, there are 25 official languages spoken, 22 of which are Mayan³, while in Mexico, there are 68 languages, 64 ethnolinguistic groups, and approximately 364 language varieties⁴. Data on Indigenous populations from Mexico and Guatemala are often combined with Spanish-speaking Latino populations⁵. However, Indigenous populations often have very different cultural and linguistic values and needs than Spanish-only speaking Latinos. Therefore, there is a growing need to create intentional, linguistically accessible, and culturally informed health education materials for Indigenous language speakers from Latin America.

Limited English proficient speakers, such as many Indigenous farmworkers, face many barriers to health care and are more likely to avoid seeking medical care due to the lack of insurance, language barriers, fear of discriminatory immigration practices, distrust of hospital settings, medical doctors, and Western practices than non-Indigenous Latino farmworkers. According to a recent study, Indigenous farmworkers in California shared that their needs in clinical settings were unmet, their medical visits felt rushed, and assumptions by medical providers were made regarding their Spanish-speaking ability, background,⁶ and medical conditions. Many Indigenous peoples are bilingual and can understand some Spanish, but still strongly prefer receiving health education in their native languages. Resources or interpretation in Mesoamerican Indigenous languages are often not provided in major structural bodies or entities in the United States, such as the immigration court system? medical service providers, and local schools.

To effectively reach and educate Indigenous farmworkers, we have to do more than translate existing information. We need to build culturally relevant, linguistically appropriate, and socially sensitive messages and materials with the input and expertise of Indigenous communities. While several resources explain the process of developing easy-to-read materials for low-literacy populations,⁸ there is little to no information on creating resources for Mesoamerican Indigenous groups.

The Rural Women's Health Project, Language Access Florida, and the National Center for Farmworker Health, in collaboration with Indigenous language interpreters from the Red de Intérpretes y Promotores Interculturales in Mexico and Kikotemal TV in Guatemala, developed this toolkit based on multiple years of working and collaborating with multilingual Indigenous communities. This toolkit offers valuable recommendations to consider while creating community-centered resources for and with Indigenous language speakers.



Elements for Community-Based Education Materials



Figure 1: Elements for Community-Based Education Materials

The figure above represents the core elements of community-based education materials. These elements should be considered when developing effective educational materials that are responsive to the needs of the population served. Although these elements are universally or broadly applied in the development of effective and responsive materials for all populations, adaptations should be made depending on the language and language varieties spoken by the community members using the materials in order to meet their language needs. For example, not all Indigenous languages are written, and not all community members have learned the written versions of their languages. However, knowing the language variety spoken by your community can help determine if you will need to produce written materials, audio materials, or both. The following six elements serve to the material development process.

1. **Inspires** – Health messaging should be easy to understand, conveying a message that readers will want to share with others. Like the concept "each one, teach one," in which the learner feels responsible for teaching others,⁹ it is critical that the messaging motivates others to change their behaviors and encourages others to do the same.

2. **Models** – Health education materials model the desired behavior or health action within the messaging and visuals by providing clear steps to implement the chosen behavior or action. The materials should help recommended actions feel more realistic and achievable by representing the reader's identity, environment, and social reality reflected by the characters and setting of the material.

3. **Readable** – Two key essential concepts in producing health materials are understanding the general literacy level of the target community and, with the knowledge of Indigenous language speakers, identifying if the language has a written alphabet that can be used in the materials produced.

4. **Realistic** – A critical step of communication is making sure individuals can follow the recommendations. Readers need to see, feel, and understand their ability to act on recommendations. There must be a perspective of possible change that images can support. Use photographs that show an item, such as a food item, that is known to be the targeted community's preference (i.e., using an image of queso blanco [white cheese] instead of cheddar cheese).

5. **Relevant** – Health topics are often developed based on required project deliverables. To ensure that health education materials will be impactful, gather community input on health education topics of concern or interest. Work with a review or community leadership team to assist you in weaving relevant concepts into the health topic being covered.

6. **Relatable** – Using community member models and familiar visuals increases interest in the material and a connection to the message. While stock images or polished designs may seem more appealing to Western American audiences, relatable imagery is critical to reaching multilingual communities, including Indigenous language speakers. To learn about appropriate imagery, consult with Indigenous language speakers in the community on relevant imagery to ensure that the images used by an organization are culturally relevant and not stereotypical.

KEY TIPS

- Know the language and specific language variety of the target community.
- Utilize images from the community instead of stock photos.
- Be mindful of the specifics of cultural representation, meaning how language and culture are portrayed.
- Work with a team of advisors from the community, including community health promoters, individuals served by local organizations with whom trust is established, etc., to ensure linguistic and cultural messaging is on point.



Steps to Community-Based Health Education Material Development

The following steps for developing community-based health education materials were created from the authors' collective experiences working for and with diverse and multilingual communities. Past experiences indicate that the most effective ways to convey health education and messaging involve community collaboration at every step of the process. Material development is an iterative process that strengthens relationships, generates knowledge, and fosters respect and understanding of the different cultures of the individuals involved.

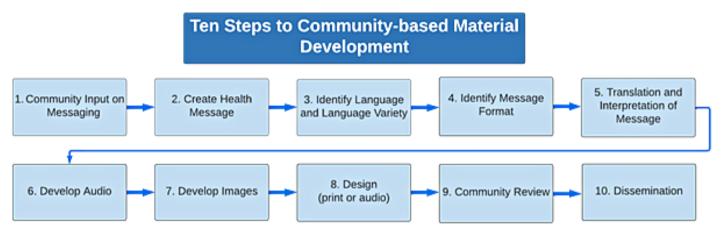


Figure 2: Steps to Community-Based Material Development

1. Community Input on Messaging

Assess if the topic is of community interest

When crafting your health message, it is essential to understand if the health topic resonates with the community and why. Results of assessments on community needs or interests must be considered in developing messages for greater impact. Community Health Workers and outreach workers often know what gaps in health education are important to address. They can inform you about what unique local challenges and resources exist to make your health message useful and make your call for action feasible based on the local context.

Gather community surveys

You can gather input through surveys from different individuals or organizations that work in those communities because they might know resources that are helpful for your messaging. However, some community members, such as Indigenous language speakers who may be undocumented, may be hesitant to fill out surveys. This hesitancy is one of the main reasons Indigenous language speakers are underrepresented in census data and survey results related to language needs in the United States. For this reason, it is important to ensure that if surveys are used, they are translated into multiple languages, converted to audio surveys when necessary, and administered by trusted community members.

Check for existing resources

Look for existing resources for multilingual and immigrant communities online and in your community regarding the health message that you are working on. International, federal, and state governmental organizations, non-profits, and universities who work with similar populations might have developed materials about topics of interest for your community that might serve as a guide for you. If you identify existing materials, you may utilize the following assessment to check the cultural and linguistic appropriateness of the materials:

- Assessment in English
- Assessment in Spanish

2. Develop the Health Message

Focus on one key message

Health messaging must be concise, clear, and simple, avoid jargon and complex terminology, and model the behavior or desired action. Staying clear of jargon, acronyms, and advanced medical phrasing will be necessary for the reader and the future translator who may not be familiar with or have expertise with technical medical terminology. Messaging for medical procedures or taking medication is best outlined in individual images or numbered steps.

Making a readable message will be necessary. However, keep in mind that readability indexes to assure literacy levels such as SMOG, and Gunning Fox are not designed for use with Indigenous languages. For this reason, getting feedback from Indigenous language speakers before sharing translated materials is essential. Your organization can learn more about what makes information readable to your audience through this feedback.

Make the message resonate with community members

A major challenge for multilingual speakers is the cultural understanding of health prevention and treatment protocols shared by Western American sources. For example, for some Indigenous community members, a focus on individual perspective or individual care is seen as ineffective and irrelevant. Instead, some Indigenous language speakers will resonate further with materials that focus on the community's well-being or the health of elders in the community who are carriers of the culture and the language. Therefore, U.S. public health messaging needs to be altered to cultural phrasing that inspires, motivates, and highlights the value of self-care as community care. This is often the first hurdle in preparing health messaging.

For example, during the COVID-19 pandemic, many health messages focused on telling individuals to care for their own health and avoid risks. However, advocates for Indigenous communities, such as the Centro Profesional Indígena de Asesoría, Defensa (CEPIADET), based in Mexico, recommended changing messaging emphasizing their community members' well-being and cultural heritage¹⁰. One of their posters on COVID-19 read:

"Seguir las medidas de prevención frente al COVID-19, es cuidar y preservar la vida y la diversidad de nuestros pueblos." "Following preventative COVID-19 measures is caring for and preserving life and the diversity of our people."

This message focuses on taking care of the community as a way to preserve the culture and the tradition rather than emphasizing individualistic care.

3. Identify the Language and Language Variety of the Community

Identify towns or municipalities of the target community

Once you have defined the message, you need to know your audience's language and the community they are from to identify translation resources.

There are multiple varieties of each Indigenous language. For example, in Oaxaca, there are 16 Indigenous languages spoken, of which there are 177 varieties. Each of the varieties may not be mutually understood. Consider a language variety equivalent to a general language category such as "Roman Languages." Not all Roman languages are mutually comprehensible. The same is true for all varieties of an Indigenous language. Varieties of Zapoteco, for example, can be as different from one another as Spanish is from French. For this reason, when translating information into Indigenous languages, it's important to translate it into the correct variety. Generally speaking, there are no broadly understood varieties of Indigenous languages in Mexico and Central America.

To learn the most appropriate language variety to use for a translation, ask community members what town (pueblo), municipality (municipalidad), department (departamento), or state (estado), and country they are from. In most cases, the name of the municipality corresponds to the name of the language variety. For example, speakers of Chinanteco from the municipality of San Pedro Yolox in Oaxaca will speak Chinanteco of the San Pedro Yolox variety. The municipality is the authority in an Indigenous community, which is why the name of the municipality dictates the name of the language. For this reason, when trying to learn what language variety a community speaks, it's essential to survey and know from what municipality the community members are from. External resources can be used to determine the municipalities that speakers are from, including, for example, the INEGI institute in Mexico: https://www.inegi.org.mx/default.html._

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Evaluate for spoken or written language

When you know your target audience's language and language variety, define whether you will need the message written or spoken to develop your material or if you will need both. This will help you understand whether you need a translation, interpretation team, or both. For most audio translations, translators first develop a written script for the translation before recording the voiced-over narrative. Sometimes, it might be beneficial to shorten or simplify the material's content before translating it, especially since many technical terms may not have direct translations into Indigenous languages. In these cases, you will need to speak with your translation team about best describing specific concepts while maintaining clarity and accuracy in the materials.

Locate a certified interpretation & translation team.

An interpreter or translation organization knowledgeable about Indigenous languages can help you translate and interpret your health message into your audience's language and language variety. **This directory** can help identify an interpretation/translation team.

4. Identify Message Format

Health literacy considerations with lower literacy individuals

When choosing a message format, you must consider two key elements: literacy levels and whether the language variety you are working with is written. Many Indigenous languages are more difficult to read and write, and intonation plays a significant role in identifying the variety. Sometimes, a simple change in intonation can signal a shift in a language variety. For this reason, it is essential to accompany any written or visual resource with an aural component to make content as accessible as possible. This does not mean that materials should not be written. Writing Indigenous languages is important for accessing information and ensuring that Indigenous languages are part of the written cultural record.

In many Indigenous communities, even those whose languages may not be commonly written, road signs and numbers on signs are written in Indigenous languages to create cultural connections among the community. Numbers are often written down as words in Indigenous languages rather than written using Roman numerals. Shorter terms and concepts, like numbers and names, are often written in Indigenous languages to forge connections among community members. The prevalence of writing in Indigenous languages depends on the community.

For example, many speakers of Zapoteco, Mixteco, and Mixe varieties commonly include written documentation. Other communities may rely less on writing, but it is essential not to ignore the written word when communicating information with Indigenous language speakers. If you create a handout or a visual component without a recording, consider having an outreach worker who speaks the language explain the resource in the intended language.

In some cases, when your target audience reads Spanish better than their Indigenous language, it might be helpful to provide written content in Spanish alongside the Indigenous language, in addition to providing visual and audio translations.

Embracing a combination of written, visual, and aural modalities can help make materials accessible across communities.

Education messaging formats for Indigenous language speakers

Before selecting your messaging format, ensure that the community has and continues to have input. Below is a list of potential messaging formats for your health messaging project and a few recommendations on the most successful educational tools.



Traditional formats to disseminate health education messages include flyers or posters. However, other innovative formats have proven successful among multilingual communities, such as the fotonovelas, radionovelas, Loteria, and the use of cartoons.

The Fotonovela as an image-based educational tool

A major challenge in health education and behavior intervention is reaching people with low literacy skills and language or cross-cultural communication barriers. An innovative, practical approach for healthcare workers to reach this population and change behaviors is through the use of the fotonovela.¹¹

The fotonovela places concepts in a relevant, relatable context and offers powerful role models. People are more apt to change their behaviors when they see someone like them taking action. In terms of literacy, fotonovelas offer greater readability and comprehension. Additionally, integrating learners into project development increases the cultural appropriateness and sensitivity of the message and provides the flexibility to introduce socio-cultural issues.

The novela format is an excellent educational tool and has proven to be a successful means of communicating health information and other social issues that are indirectly health related.¹³ All fotonovelas developed by the Rural Women's Health Project have incorporated four key concepts:

- "Each one, teach one." This means that teaching someone empowers them to teach others about what they learned.
- Presentation of realistic options or solutions to issues.
- Modeling of positive health behaviors.
- Inclusion of all health messages and action steps into the storyline.



Figure 3: Fotonovela in Mam Language. Rural Women's Health Project & Farmworker Justice

Radionovelas

If you have a script for a fotonovela, it can be altered into a radionovela! Like other audio pieces, radionovelas can be shared on various platforms, such as social media, WhatsApp, and community radio. The Rural Women's Health Project and the National Center for Farmworker Health developed the following examples:

- Griselda la dudosa (Rural Women's Health Project): https://rwhp.org/covid-19-radio.html
- Vaccines for children

(National Center for Farmworker Health): https://www.ncfh.org/uploads/3/8/6/8/38685499/vaccin es_for_children_faq_v3.mp3

• ¡Todo por la Familia! Radio PSA

(Hispanic Communications Network & NCFH): https://www.ncfh.org/uploads/3/8/6/8/38685499/ncfh_p sa_5_span_30.mp3

Loteria

The Loteria is a classic Mexican board game similar to Bingo in the U.S. As an educational tool, it incorporates different images to discuss essential health actions or behaviors that need to be taught to a specific audience. It generally does not require text, so it is widely popular among different audiences.

• See Rural Health Women's Project Loteria_

Cartoons

Cartoons usually have a lighthearted, casual tone that can effectively convey health messaging. However, depicting real-life scenarios in cartoons is sometimes more challenging to illustrate, as cartoons typically represent humor. If you choose this format, caution should be taken when illustrating characters. You must consider how the characters are being presented and consider factors such as skin tone, clothing, body size, and expressions, which should reflect the dignity of the population you are creating the material for.

 Comunidades Indigenas en Liderazgo (CIELO) created short cartoon clips in various Indigenous languages to share information about COVID-19. The following video is in K'iche: Vacúnate: https://vimeo.com/671015558



Figure 4: Fotonovela

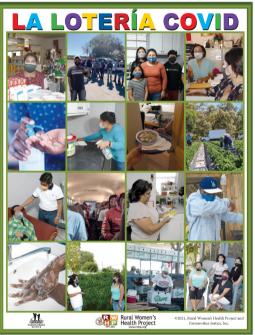


Figure 5: Loteria with COVID themes by Farmworker Justice and Rural Women's Health Project



Figure 6: Cartoon by Cielo

5. Translation and Interpretation of Message

Cultural reflection in translation and interpretation

Collaboration is critical to translating and interpreting all languages, particularly Indigenous ones. While translating refers to written language, interpreting refers to spoken language. Translators or interpreters should work in teams to verify, edit, and user-test translations before sharing them with a community. This is particularly important because many Mesoamerican Indigenous languages do not have exact translations for Western words or concepts, so words or phrases often require longer descriptions.

If an organization works with a translation business, that organization should ask the business what team will be completing the translation and what processes of validation and verification they will undertake. There should be a team of reviewers who review the translation before it is shared.

> Translation work is collaborative, especially when working with Indigenous languages that have multiple varieties and where small tonal changes can impact the meaning of an entire project.

6. Develop Audio (if applicable)

Voice actors

Once you have finalized the messaging and script, you can collaborate with community members or organizations who provide interpretation to serve as the voice actors for the audio recordings. As mentioned before, Indigenous language varieties can vary in degrees of mutual intelligibility, and the tone can change the meaning of words. Therefore, it is important to find fluent speakers in those languages.

Audio pieces can be approached as "edu-tainment," recordings that are educational and entertaining. Their message should be relatable, memorable, engaging, and attention-grabbing. However, remember that what sounds fun or rich in storytelling in English or Spanish may differ with Indigenous language speakers. Voice patterns and sounds are different, as storytelling is a cultural form of expression. So, our "sounding engaging" ideas may not resonate with the listener. For this reason, it is crucial that you work with community guides and interpreters from the communities you wish to serve.

It is important to approach audio pieces as "edu-tainment," by creating recordings that are educational and entertaining.

6. Develop Audio (continued)

Tips for audio recording

- Before recording, provide the written script and discuss essential cultural and social elements with your voice actors.
- Practice and make a test recording with your voice actors.
- Prepare a quiet environment free from background noises and echoes.
- Leverage cultural songs from specific communities to increase engagement and impact since music is integral to many Indigenous cultures.

For examples of audio pieces and Indigenous radio programming, there are organizations that weave Indigenous language representation into their programming.

- The Mixteco-Indigenous Community Organizing Project (MICOP) in California has a community radio project called Radio Indígena, which provides programming on various topics in at least seven Mixteco languages, Zapoteco, and Purépecha.https://mixteco.org/radio-indigena/
- WeCount! In Homestead, Florida, also has a radio project called Radio Poder: La Chispa del Pueblo, which has programming in Mam, Ixil, Q'anjob'al, K'iche', and Mixteco. https://www.we-count.org/radio-poder
- Radio B'alam is a Mam radio group project: https://www.facebook.com/radiodelacomunidadindigenamayamam/

Quality of recordings

When working with translation and interpretation agencies, it is essential to be clear about the quality of recording that you intend to use. Many interpreters of Indigenous languages, mainly when languages are very rare, live in rural parts of their communities and may not have access to professional recording equipment. Often, internet access may be limited, especially when attempting to send large audio files. For this reason, collaborate with your translation and interpretation partners to decide how audios will be received, edited, shared, and stored.



7. Develop Images

Cultural relevance

When trying to connect with Indigenous language speakers, use imagery that reflects the target audience's context and culture. Imagery representing the community or traditions will be useful for fostering connections and communicating that the information was designed with Indigenous language speakers in mind. Imagery is also critical for lower literacy readers or those new to many medical practices. You can consult with community members on the cultural appropriateness of the visuals and research what different elements look like in Indigenous communities before these images are incorporated into educational resources.

For instance, images of food, medical devices, and buildings may need to be adapted. For example, a hospital building in the U.S. may look very different from a hospital building in an Indigenous community abroad. Similarly, if you use materials or images produced by other groups, remember the physical environment in which the community you want to reach lives. For example, images used in an education tool built for a Mam community living in Oakland will not reflect the Mam community you might be serving in rural Florida. You will want images that reflect the urban or rural community where you work and serve. Actors should reflect the community and environment of the Indigenous community you serve. For this reason, the inclusion of community members as your actors is beneficial. It also adds interest to the tool when it is disseminated

Imagery that represents the community or traditions will be useful for fostering connections and communicating that the information was designed with Indigenous language speakers in mind.



7. Develop Images (continued)

Strategies for creating audiovisual messaging

- Use the municipality's name to get specific community members' attention. For example, if a community member from the municipality of San Pedro Yolox sees a slogan such as "Salud in San Pedro Yolox," they will know the name of the community and be motivated to read or attend the event. Names of more general communities, such as Mixteco, also have Indigenous names that can be used in materials to reach various audiences.
- Create a glossary of general community names in Indigenous languages, such as Mixteco, Zapoteco, and Mixe, to use the appropriate name when creating materials. For example, the term "Ñuu Savi" is the name some Mixtecan people use to refer to themselves, so using that term on materials for speakers of different Mixteco varieties may be a helpful outreach strategy. These phrases can be used in brief social media campaigns or polls asking community members to respond with their language varieties and information needs.
- Use watermarked images in the infographic background with a picture of the municipality, the state, or the community. Watermarking is the process of superimposing a logo or piece of text atop a document or image file. For example, in an infographic translated into a Mam variety, a watermark image of a map of Guatemala or the Quetzal, the national bird of Guatemala, can be used in the background to draw people's attention.
- Use music, images, and cultural symbols to reach Indigenous language speakers since the simple translation of words may not always draw their attention.

8. Design (print or audio)

Attention to legibility of font size and style

For printed materials, use a font size large enough for older people to read and understand. Many sources recommend keeping font sizes between 12 and 14 points⁸. The ideal font type is a "serif" font as they provide flexibility and are proven easy to read in small and large sizes, making them ideal for use in titles or body text. A few examples of serif font type you can use include Times New Roman, Garamond, Baskerville, or Georgia. Avoid using "ALL CAPS" and fancy or script fonts in texts because they are difficult to read.

Attention to colors and potential meanings

Use white or light-colored backgrounds to make the text or illustrations more legible. It is essential to ask community members if using specific colors in their cultures may enhance particular messages or if specific colors may hinder them because of their meaning. Contrasting font colors with background colors is also important for accessibility and readability.



9. Community Review

The best evaluation of your materials starts at the beginning of the project by incorporating community input throughout the process. To the end of your project, you need community input from the start on the following aspects:

- Health message impact
- Language appropriateness
- Cultural relevance

This input serves as a roadmap to successful health education material development, and there are various ways to receive input from community members on specific materials when working with Indigenous language speakers. For example:

- Collaborate with community members or members of the target audience you intend to reach.
- Recruit a community review group of people who want to provide their insight and opinions.
- Involve Community Health Workers or other trusted community leaders who can gather perspectives and evaluate materials alongside the community.
- Create in-person spaces where people can provide honest responses and feedback. This approach is favorable, as it reduces "yes and no" comments from online surveys.
- Use text messages or chat applications to communicate with your community review group by sharing a printed or digital copy of the material and providing context and background of the health message. To facilitate a conversation, send some questions to gather information on the following:
 - Clarity of the messaging
 - Overall design and illustrations
 - Translations and meanings
 - Concepts or words that may be confusing
 - Cultural suggestions

Your feedback questions can be modified according to each type of material and content. As a best practice, compensate your community partners for providing their insights and help increase your materials' effectiveness and reach.

Indigenous community members should always be compensated for their time and expertise, whether they are providing input on messaging, sharing expertise on language or culture, or doing acting or voice recordings. If financial compensation cannot be offered, speak with community members about other ways you can compensate them for their time.



10. Dissemination

Social media and key community gatekeepers

There are many different forms of communication used by multilingual communities, including social media channels and chat applications. In the U.S., many Indigenous language speakers create Facebook networks that are specific to their own municipality or community. Many Indigenous community members avoid posting or engaging with public groups for privacy and security reasons. Thus, having key community members share information on their own Facebook pages may be a useful dissemination strategy. A few tips to increase reach through social media include:

- Tagging individual community members who will then share information on their personal pages.
- Paying for promoting posts shared by the organization so that it reaches individuals directly.
- Agency-wide Facebook accounts are often less impactful than individual accounts.

Sharing your health education materials through Community Health Workers, outreach workers, and health promoters is another effective dissemination strategy. They have close communication with the target communities, and they may also use these materials as aids in their health education and information activities. Just as they are key actors at the beginning of the material creation process, they are essential in sharing and distributing these health messages often through chat apps like WhatsApp once they have been completed.

Printed materials

U.S. methods of information dissemination, such as social media, are not always appropriate for Indigenous communities.¹⁰ There are also generational differences in how communities prefer to receive information. Older generations prefer printed materials they can hold and keep for future reference, whereas younger generations may prefer to send digital images via WhatsApp or other messaging platforms. Therefore, there is still value in nicely prepared print material. That material represents that a community is seen and respected enough to have prepared high-quality materials for them. Printed materials with educational messaging on objects such as calendars, booklets, or mugs usually have a great impact on Indigenous language speakers.

You and your organization are encouraged to survey your target audience's community and learn about the forms of communication that may be more effective for them. There may be individual preferences that shift over time, so it will be useful to try different formats for reaching the community and keeping track of what is most impactful. And, of course, it is important to keep checking back with the community as your production of messaging evolves.

Printed materials on objects such as calendars, booklets or mugs with educational messaging usually have great impact with Indigenous language speakers.



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