

# COMMUNICATING TO UTAH'S CULTURALLY & LINGUISTICALLY DIVERSE COMMUNITIES: WHERE TO START & SUGGESTIONS ON MAKING IT A PRACTICE

## WHY IS THIS NEEDED?

Equity and belonging will transform the way organizations approach communications work and engage with communities.

**EQUITY:** The creation of opportunities for historically underserved populations to have access to resources, opportunities, and information that are capable of closing achievement gaps.

**BELONGING:** A feeling of deep relatedness and acknowledgment. Ensuring underrepresented communities feel reflected in the messaging, campaign, or project.

Utah is one of the fastest growing states in the nation and racially and ethnically diverse people are now driving most of that growth. According to the 2020 Census and Language Reports from the Utah Department of Health, nearly **1 in 4 Utahns is a person of color and more than 36% of people report speaking English “less than well”**. This is a call for organizations to learn from each other and the diverse communities they serve. The goal is to ensure an opportunity-filled future and the development of crisis responses that can effectively serve all groups based on their unique needs.

As communicators, our power lies in storytelling. We help identify the narratives, messengers, words, and images that shape the realities of our communities and society. With that power comes a responsibility to resist perpetuating harmful systems and do better. Or, as we say, do good. It takes courage and vulnerability to talk about inequities honestly. Let's keep pushing each other to do better in our work of doing good.

*Adapted from The Communications Network  
National Nonprofit Association for  
Communications Professionals*

## FROM THEIR OWN WORDS: PUBLIC INFORMATION OFFICERS AND INFORMATION SPECIALISTS ROLE IN EQUITY

The COVID-19 Multicultural Advisory Committee's Language Access Workgroup and Communication Workgroup partnered to survey a cohort of public information officers across the state and also hosted a community discussion with local information specialists to better understand the growing need for equity in crisis communications. Key lessons included:

- Access barriers are connected to how **culturally responsive** your messaging is.
- Establishing an **inclusive budget** to capture translation, compensation for community liaisons, and outreach is vitally important.
- Building trust and community with underrepresented groups **requires safe and brave** spaces for community leaders to share concerns.
- Based on responses collected, public information officers are now more actively centering equity in their communication efforts by focusing on the needs of underrepresented communities. Essentially, **awareness has been built into action.**

“

The phrase, ‘nothing about us without us’ is about people making decisions about populations. If they don’t have a direct connection to that population, it is misguided at best... I just can’t emphasize enough that there needs to be [more direct connection with organizations and communities] up and down the flow chart for the state of Utah.

Community Health Advocate & Information Specialist (Ogden, Utah)

”



## EQUITY IN COMMUNICATIONS: A FRAME OF MIND

Embracing equity in communications means investing in processes and information delivery methods that are reflective of the communities that you serve. This allows better access to critical information so that all can make informed decisions, regardless of background, preferred language, or location. Establishing the following shared beliefs can lead to shared action.

1

**Embrace community members and frontline advocates as experts in their needs.**

Instead of prescribing solutions, seek to co-create with key players in diverse communities so that you understand their lived experience and needs better.

2

**Build relationships of trust proactively.** Meet community organizations and leaders where they are to start lines of communication before a crisis.

3

**Be both data and story informed.** Use data to inform the efficiency of processes (i.e. outbreak and demographic data), but embed storytelling into messaging to resonate with communities to inspire uptake.

4

**Create content that is consistent, culturally-aware, and non-conflicting.** Establish operations that follows these principles from the beginning so that further harm on marginalized communities is avoided.

5

**Understand that communities learn and receive information in different ways.**

Language, cultural background, socioeconomic status, location, age, and gender should be considered when forming messages.

6

**Embrace a growth and learning culture.** This mindset takes practice, collaboration, and resilience. Accept and expect growing moments and ease into discomfort.

## KEY WAYS TO GET STARTED:

- 1 **Mobilize:** Verify that the message is informed and supported by key community voices. Host listening sessions, focus groups, or town halls to invite feedback.
- 2 **Resource Adequately:** Allocate a budget that will serve underrepresented communities at a representative and equity-informed level (i.e. if the Spanish-speaking population makes up 20% of your community, assign a large enough budget that amplifies the message to reach the majority of that group).
- 3 **Translate into Priority Languages:** Determine key languages from each community to translate information into and identify important messages to emphasize based on incidence and prevalence data, not just the population size of language speakers. For example, there are particular communities that have and continue to experience higher COVID-19 death and infection rates because of systemic barriers to quarantine (i.e. multigenerational households) and access to information (i.e. delayed translation of materials). Even though they may make up a small percentage of the total population, the needs are still relevant and responding to them can benefit the entire community.
 

**The Utah Department of Health has created a language prioritization matrix in response to COVID-19 that outlines the following:**

**Considerations When Translating Materials**

  1. **Length of document/material: What is the most important information to share?**
  2. **Topic sensitivity and need: Will this information equip communities to make informed decisions?**
  3. **Cost: How many people in your area need this resource? Can your budget align to this need?**
- 4 **Disseminate:** Share information through a variety of channels (paid, organic, grassroots) and forms (digital, printed, billboard) based on geographic need, informed by inequities experienced by specific communities.
- 5 **Stay Connected:** Follow up with community members to ensure that information was effectively received and could be acted upon, if applicable. Establishing a culture of follow-up will help catch information gaps as they arise.

## UTAH COVID-19 LANGUAGE TRANSLATION EFFORT

All Languages (Alphabetical)	Priority Languages (Alphabetical)	Most Requested Overall (Alphabetical)
Arabic	Arabic	Arabic
ASL	Burmese	French
Bosnian	French	Nepal
Burmese	Karenic	Pashto
Bhutanese	Kinyarwanda	Spanish
Cantonese	Mandarin	Vietnamese
Chinese	Marshallese	
Dari	Nepal	
French	Pashto	
Karenic	Persian (Farsi)	
Kinyarwanda	Portugese	
Kirundi	Russian	
Korean	Samoa	
Lingali	Somali	
Mandarin	Spanish	
Marshallese	Swahili	
Navajo	Tongan	
Nepali	Vietnamese	
Pashto		
Persian (Farsi)		
Portugese		
Rohingya		
Russian		
Samoa		
Sangho		
Somali		
Spanish		
Swahili		
Tagalog		
Thai		
Tigrinya		
Tongan		
Vietnamese		



## REFLECTION QUESTIONS:

- 1 Does your organization's communication budget support equity values and mindsets?
- 2 How extensive are your relationships with reporters, editors, and other news media staff who are, themselves, African American, Latino/x, Asian American, Native American/Alaskan Native, or people of color?
- 3 Do you have an ongoing feedback loop to seek input from people who live in the communities you exist to serve?
- 4 Are you letting opportunity-building, access, and equity guide your choices about the physical locations you use to engage stakeholders and conduct business?
- 5 Has your organization infused equity into your organization's role in conferences, special events, panel presentations, and other settings?
- 6 Does your organization have guidelines for responding to racist or discriminatory incidents in public relations or news, even if what has happened is not central to your stated mission?
- 7 Has your organization begun a process of racial healing to help uncover how the organization may have contributed to perpetuating inequities in the past? Do you include all levels of staff in these healing opportunities?
- 8 Have you developed reports to share what the organization has learned with other organizational and community stakeholders to foster growth together?

*Adapted from The Communications Network  
National Nonprofit Association for Communications Professionals*







## LET'S CONNECT

**Claudia Loayza** [cloayza@utah.gov](mailto:cloayza@utah.gov)  
Communications & Community  
Engagement Coordinator  
Utah Division of Multicultural Affairs