



Beyond Translation

How to Truly Connect with the Latino Community
in Recycling and Sustainability Programs

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Translation ≠ Connection

Translation Alone Is Not Inclusion

Traditional Approach

- Translating flyers is considered enough
- Bilingual signage solves participation gaps
- Assuming communities engage automatically



Real Engagement Needs

- Trust and authentic relationships
- Cultural understanding and representation
- Accessible and inclusive communication



"Translation alone does not build trust or create belonging."

Real Barriers to Participation

Common barriers Latino families may experience:



Interactive Activity

Small Group Discussion

What Barriers Really Exist?

Instructions:

1. Form groups of 3-4 where you are seated
2. Choose and read 1 of the 3 scenarios
3. Identify barriers to recycling and composting in your area
4. Be prepared to share with larger group



What Barriers really Exist?

3 Scenarios



Scenario 1

José works two jobs — a morning shift at a warehouse and evenings at a restaurant. His wife, María, is home all day managing three kids under 10. By the time José gets home, dinner, baths, and bedtime are the only priorities.

A flyer about a Saturday composting workshop lands on the kitchen table and stays there for two weeks. It's not that they don't care about the environment — it's that survival mode leaves no bandwidth for anything that feels optional.



Scenario 2

Rosa's family has been sorting their recycling wrong for years — plastic bags in the blue bin, styrofoam with cardboard — because the city's recycling guide only came in English, and the Spanish version on the website used terminology that didn't match how she learned Spanish in Guatemala.

When her bin got tagged as "contaminated," no one explained why. Now she just throws everything in the trash to avoid the embarrassment. The program lost her not because she was unwilling, but because it never actually met her where she was.



Scenario 3

Abuela Carmen has lived with the family for two years since immigrating from Oaxaca. She grew up composting naturally — kitchen scraps went to the garden or the chickens, nothing was wasted.

But the city's food scrap program asks her to store rotting food in a small bin in the kitchen and trust that a truck will take it somewhere good. It feels strange and a little suspicious. Back home, you knew where your waste went. Here, the program assumes a baseline of institutional trust that her family simply doesn't have yet.

Strategic Reflection

Para reflexionar

How many of these barriers are solved simply by *translating* a sign?



6 Tools You Can Use Tomorrow



1. Build Partnerships

Libraries, schools, and Latino organizations.



2. Trusted Messengers

Community leaders and relatable voices.



3. Simplify Language

Human-centered and clear communication.



4. Be Present

Festivals, markets, and family events.



5. Listen First

Ask communities what they actually need.



6. Familiar Channels

Facebook, WhatsApp, and voice messages.

Inclusion Begins with Belonging

“Inclusion does not begin with translation. It begins when a community feels that it truly belongs.”

Strategic Checklist:

- Building authentic relationships?
- Content culturally relevant?
- Latino representation on the team?
- Listening before launching?

Strategic Action Item

What is **one thing** your organization could change this month to build a more authentic connection?



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